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Class, Class Mobility, and the Consumption of Household Technology in Salem, Massachusetts, 1890-1914

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CLASS, CLASS MOBILITY, AND THE CONSUMPTION OF HOUSEHOLD
TECHNOLOGY IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS, 1890-1914

A Thesis Presented

by

CANDACE L. STEPHENS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

December 2010

History Program

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ABSTRACT

CLASS, CLASS MOBILITY, AND THE CONSUMPTION OF HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY IN SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS, 1890-1914

December 2010

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This study looks at the rise of household technologies available in Salem, Massachusetts from 1890-1914, and examines how these technologies, from importation to sale and consumption, defined class and class aspirations in the city and reflect transformations seen throughout the United States during the turn of the twentieth century. So that we can best understand how technology was used within individual homes, this research centers almost exclusively around four families whose businesses, and residences are dissected to better identify how their consumption of goods and technology created new opportunities, as well as problems, for household members and domestic servants employed by them to use new objects.

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INTRODUCTION

During the second half of the nineteenth century, migration from family farms into the nation's cities accelerated as individuals searched for jobs in the new labor markets and for financial success.¹ The western world's shift to industrial production impacted the lives of Americans of all socio-economic classes, changing how families made needed purchases while simultaneously igniting a spirit of consumption among citizens. Material goods became more accessible and affordable to consumers of all classes, and patrons sought a new place in their communities by purchasing new technology and luxury goods for themselves and their homes. By the 1880s men and women in major cities gave their patronage to newly emerging department stores. By the 1890s department stores had expanded into smaller urban areas, feeding local consumption and helping patrons define or redefine their social status and class through their purchases. Consumers, flush with the desire for readymade goods, found within mail order catalogs, women's magazines, and through area exhibitions, purchased new household goods and technology to define their class or to seek mobility between classes.

In this study I will be looking at the rise of household technologies available in Salem, Massachusetts from 1890-1914, and will study the ways in which these technologies, from importation to sales and consumption, defined class and class

aspirations within the city and reflect transformations seen throughout the United States during the turn of the twentieth century. Salem is a microcosm of change similar to that seen sweeping other cities in the United States during this time. Salem's Revolutionary-era commercial successes, linked exclusively to maritime trade during those years, blossomed again in the 1880s due to success in the leather and textile industries. The triumph of Salem's Victorian commercial center reflects a rebirth of Salem grandiosity, and shows how the city strove toward modernity through retail and technological changes. Additionally, class divisions within the city, based upon social and geographical boundaries, present a clear connection between material culture, technologies, and class.

How did technology serve each class and how did it define each family's class or confirm social mobility? The study of specific households allows better insight into the impact of technology on Massachusetts homes north of Boston between the years 1890-1914. We will examine how technologies such as electricity, indoor plumbing, and central heating entered Salem homes and how their use lessened the burden of domestic chores for housewives and household laborers. What changes did the purchase of cookstoves, iceboxes, vacuums, carpet sweepers, and washing and sewing machines require of the mistresses and domestics who used them?

A family of exceptional economic prosperity and historical importance in Salem, the Ropes family, will be studied, concentrating on the last generation to live in the family mansion from 1894-1907. The three unmarried sisters, Sarah Putnam (1827-1899), Mary Pickman (1843-1903), and Eliza Orne (1837-1907), inherited the family

home from their older brother and moved there in 1893. The Ropes sisters made sweeping changes to the family home, fully modernizing it with a Victorian kitchen, electricity, and central heating. The changes they made in their home reflect their desire for modernity and made them a model to other community members as they sought to make their own domestic improvements.

The commercial wealth of James Almy (1833-1899), the man who revitalized Salem's dimming merchant community, will also be examined. James Almy established the city's first department store in Salem's downtown shopping community, making the city, as well as his store, a go-to destination for all of the north shore.

The wealth of the Ropes household and Almy's store is balanced by the study of two middle class families also from Salem. The households of Fred Smith (1861-1940), manager of the Salem Electric Lighting Company from 1891-1928, and Japanese immigrant Bunkio Matsuki (1867-1940), businessman and importer of Japanese wares, represent Salem's middle class community. Fred Smith and his family are important examples of the possibility of class mobility in Salem as both he and his wife, Sarah Gray (1868-1931), were born into Salem's laboring community and rose to middle class prosperity during the 1890s. Bunkio Matsuki and his American wife, Martha Meacom (1872-1916), also demonstrate the possibility of class mobility in Salem. Bunkio Matsuki was born to modest means, as was his wife. The pair enjoyed a comfortable middle class standing in an "Oriental" crazed Salem due to Matsuki's successful import business and his unique celebrity status.

Historians have struggled to define the middle class in late Victorian America, since the concept of the middle class in America was just emerging and becoming recognized. For this purpose, we will define the middle class in America, and in Salem for that matter, in much of the same way historian Elaine Abelson did in her analysis of class in the nineteenth century, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving* (1989). Abelson suggests that a family's home, "including what went in it, residential location, levels and patterns of consumption, child-rearing strategies, and leisure activities," all factored in to determine and ascribe class to families.² The middle class becomes classified in cultural as well as economic terms. In Salem, one could argue that education also played a role in this determination of class and, to some extent, family heritage. This broader definition of what constitutes "class" will inform how we explore and understand the Almy, Smith, and Matsuki families and how we define their places within Salem's social structure.

This study will show which technologies each family could afford and how each family adopted technology to alter or redefine their community status. Additionally, this study will look at how early advertising shaped shopping spaces and informed consumers of new merchandise. Early advertising, the popularity of women's magazines, and newly defined consumer culture in America drove the demand for new household technology in individual homes and changed the meaning of home life and the status of the American housewife. Still, the question remains, did mistresses burden themselves with additional household chores when they adopted any or all of these new "time saving devices or was this work simply transferred to those in their employment?"³

As wealthy and middle class families purchased new objects and utilities, the domestics working in their homes became responsible for operating and caring for them. In some cases technology changed the number of domestics families hired to serve in their homes and domestics saw their daily workload increase significantly. With new appliances and utilities outfitting their homes, wealthy families retained their household laborers and middle class families hired domestics, too; employers viewed the hiring of domestics as a status symbol driven in part by advertising and fashionable teaching in women's magazines.⁴

Large department stores in cities such as Boston, New York, and Chicago celebrated modernity by offering new and plentiful merchandise choices. City dwellers were bombarded with advertising campaigns and enticed into stores with large and alluring merchandise displays. New marketing techniques allowed storeowners to expand their store's stock and create fairytale spaces where men and women could fulfill their material desires and buy small pieces of happiness. Department stores, called "palaces of consumption" by historian Susan Benson, became both tourist attraction and social gathering space for all classes, while their vast contents offered new material delights for those making purchases.⁵

By 1890 department stores not only sold needed commodities but also worked hard to advertise a desired lifestyle.⁶ Stores carried a number of necessities once made in individual homes, such as clothing, soap, candles, and food, but they also stocked frivolities such as cosmetics, fancy clothes, exotic pets, and foreign furnishings and curios. The contents of these stores appealed to male and female shoppers alike, although

women quickly became the targeted audience. Goods for sale looked to reach beyond socio-economic classes and storeowners fed off a developing culture of consumption where residents of lower and middling classes especially sought class mobility or identity through the purchase of goods.⁷

Consumer changes throughout the United States in the last two decades of the nineteenth century are easily identified in large cities where Macy's and Marshall Field stores became important go-to destinations for locals, but these same changes were occurring within smaller urban areas as well. Cities throughout America sought modernization through the advancement in technology and consumer development. The city of Salem, Massachusetts then becomes an important example of changes occurring nationwide during this time. Salem residents found their spending needs met by their local department store, Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn. The store's central location offered easy access to all neighborhoods and its vast inventory guaranteed the repeat business of the city's wealthy, middle, and laboring classes.

The construction of department stores began in America as early as the 1850s, but their importance to the making of the mass market and their impact on class and gender would not be fully seen until after the Civil War.⁸ Department stores evolved from a trinity of nineteenth century changes, including the increased settlement of urban areas, the reliability of local and national transportation (due to expanding trolley and railway systems), and continued advances in industrial technology and the output of consumer goods.⁹ Among these origins, however, appears a credible link between their rise and the popularity of world's fairs. At these various expositions fairgoers became exposed to and

saturated by a variety of goods and entertainment possibilities that greatly affected their culture.¹⁰

London's 1851 Crystal Palace Exposition is the globe's first celebrated World's Fair. This inaugural fair, rumored to be the brainchild of Queen Victoria's husband Prince Albert, sought to showcase the prowess of industry tycoons.¹¹ The fair placed both machinery and manufactured wares on display for prospective buyers; audiences drawn to Hyde Park that year consisted of mostly upper class businessmen led by their own entrepreneurial pursuits. In London, as marketing historian Robert Tamilia explains, exhibitors consisted mostly of manufacturing firms or lesser businessmen whose displays sought to find a market or expand sales for their various products. Manufacturers in London did not look to sell their products directly to the consumer, seeking rather to find businessmen willing to market their products *for* them.¹²

In the following decades, however, fair exhibitors pitched their wares to the consumers themselves. By the time Chicago hosted the Columbian Exposition in 1893, the focus of the fair had shifted almost entirely and their purpose became to amaze and entertain. Chicago's fair had less machinery, more entertainment, and showcased finished merchandise.¹³ The fairs became a way to test market new products and distribute samples of new brands. Whereas the Crystal Palace Exposition showcased machinery used to mine raw materials or create textiles, the focus on machinery at later fairs emphasized the benefit of new technology for the consumer. In Chicago, for example, the large Electricity Building not only housed the machinery used to generate the electrical power for the fair, but also included a complete model kitchen

demonstrating the use of electricity in future homes. Within the Agriculture Building, fairgoers sampled Graham Crackers, Quaker Oats, Welch's Grape Juice, Cream of Wheat, and Kellogg's Corn Flakes while looking at modern harvesting equipment.¹⁴ The Transportation Building not only housed modern train engines and steam ships but held exhibits of bicycles, carriages, and street trolleys.

In Chicago the fair had become a center of amusements and was no longer simply a display of science and industrial power.¹⁵ This shift resulted in increased visitation at fairs and cultivated a spirit of consumption among attendees. Chicago fairgoers wanted the items displayed at the fair and exhibition organizers promised consumers that it could all be theirs. The importance of events at the Columbian Exposition should not be underestimated. The events of the fair were heavily documented in newspapers. As Chicago prepared for the fair, the entire nation watched. Newspapers and magazines published nationwide informed readers of the fairground's progress, to the delight of audiences. The nation's wealthy and upper middle class citizens enjoyed trips to the White City, while those unable to go had the spirit of the fair captured for them within their own communities through special correspondents reporting from the fairgrounds.

Additionally, department stores began aggressive advertising campaigns, linking their merchandise to the events at the fair. Department stores became large buyers at the Columbian Exposition, with some retailers purchasing entire exhibits to take home and sell in their own stores. Indeed, the demand on exhibitors in Chicago was so high at the start of the fair that buyers were at first prohibited from removing their purchases from the fair grounds until manufacturers could determine that materials could be quickly

replaced!¹⁶ When buyers returned home from the fair, they advertised their acquired wares, cashing in on the excitement and popularity of the fair. Store patrons unable to book their own passage to the White City could experience a piece of the fair in their own neighborhoods as a result of new marketing strategies.

Chicago's fair is now thought to have been a "dry run for mass marketing, packaging, and advertising."¹⁷ Products introduced at the fair became famous and in following years customers demanded these brands.¹⁸ After the fair Americans sought Baker's Chocolate, Aunt Jemima, Chase & Sanborn coffee, and Pabst beer. Magee cooking ranges, enameled "Ironclad" cookware, and Empire-clothing wringers sought to lessen the burden of housekeeping chores. Bicycles, Kodak Eastman cameras, and Edison's Kinetoscope offered glimpses of future leisurely pursuits.

Prior to the emergence of department stores customers ordered needed items through popular mail order catalogs or visited local shopkeepers. Shop owners in both rural and urban communities limited their inventory somewhat and abided by the popular retailing wisdom of the day, which stressed specialization of marketed goods.¹⁹ During this time prices in these stores remained unfixed, allowing customers to negotiate prices with shopkeepers to acquire needed items inexpensively. Retailers purchased merchandise from wholesalers on credit and in turn sold their inventory to customers on credit.²⁰

The Almy Bigelow & Washburn store offered many of the same services to the men and women of Salem. Almy's sought the patronage of all the North Shore, but advertisements demonstrate attention to class and gender that is similar to that shown by

other department stores operating during this same time. Women were invited to Almy's new fitting rooms in 1892 where women could be fitted for "cloaking goods" in the same privacy that they would be assured in their own homes.²¹ The presence of lounges, toilets, and restaurants indicated that guests, primarily ladies, could linger and shop longer within the store. An undated portrait of Almy's sales staff shows nearly forty workers; three quarters of them are young women.

Almy's store offered a variety of goods at prices that satisfied the upper, middle, and laboring classes and his store was a popular choice for those living on the North Shore. Department stores in the late nineteenth century are thought to be culturally unique for the time because nowhere else could you find, for example, a distinguished gentlewoman shopping shoulder to shoulder with a working girl. The material offering of department stores leveled the field of consumption and allowed middle and laboring classes to buy items once believed to be beyond their means. Almy's tends to exemplify this. The Almy store, centrally located in downtown Salem, ensured easy access for citizens of all neighborhoods. Immigrant communities on Salem Harbor, middle class families in south Salem, and the wealthy patrons of the McIntire District could all reach the Almy store by a quick ten-minute walk. Leatherworkers on the Peabody line would have had a longer walk from their southwestern location, but twenty minutes by foot or a short trolley car ride would have easily delivered them to the Almy store.

Almy, Bigelow & Washburn sought the patronage of all the members of the community. Their varied services included dry fur storage to Salem's elite, but they also sought customers of more modest means. Almy, Bigelow & Washburn advertised

directly to Salem's immigrant laborers, as is evidenced by surviving promotional literature in both French and Polish.²²

The Almy store was an important shopping space for the people of Salem and also enjoyed the patronage of those who traveled from towns along the North Shore.

While examining the city of Salem as a microcosm of national change we will come to know the four families mentioned above living in the city during the period 1890-1914. James Almy and the magnificent store he created become important for this study because it is the spirit of his store and the items he offered for sale which become important to consumer changes in Salem during this time. The Ropes sisters, Sarah, Mary, and Eliza, are an example of Salem's wealth and prestige. These three women inherited their family home and occupied an important place in Salem society. The home in which they lived and its contents demonstrate an abundance of wealth and traditional beauty that women of the middle and laboring classes sought for their personal spaces during this time. Fred Smith's and Bunkio Matsuki's households exemplify class mobility in Salem, as demonstrated through purchasing might during this time.

The wealth of the Ropes household, and to a lesser degree the Almy home, will be balanced with the study of two middle class families also from Salem. S. Fred Smith and Bunkio Matsuki, both born of limited means, would find success in a middle class lifestyle and the material trappings that exemplified middle class life during this time. Fred Smith, manager first of the early New England Telephone Company and later of the Salem Electric Lighting Company from 1891-1928, represent Salem's middle class families. Smith left behind fifty-four handwritten diaries, dated from 1880-1930, which

include information relating to his personal life and business life.²³ Smith lived at his home with his wife, two sons, and a parade of domestic servants who worked in the family home at various times²⁴.

Bunkio Matsuki, a Japanese immigrant born in Kai-Suwa Japan,²⁵ moved to Salem in 1888 and created a fortune through the sale of Japanese home goods and curios. By 1894, Matsuki had amassed a large enough fortune to build a comfortable home for himself, his American wife Martha Meacom, and his four children on Salem's trendy Southside. Matsuki's two-story home was inspired by Japanese carpentry and aesthetic design and contained a kitchen that "modeled all modern conveniences."²⁶ Matsuki hired a Japanese woman and brought her to Salem to serve as his domestic in 1894, but by 1900 the US Census records show that she no longer lived there and a local Salem woman, Susan Cotter, resided with his family and worked as their maid.

Despite obvious social and class distinctions within the city, many of Salem's wealthy and middle class families interacted with one another with some regularity. All four families in this study hired domestic workers who lived and worked in their homes. The domestics living in the homes of their wealthy or middle class employers demonstrate the most obvious link between these three classes. The middle class families, on the same societal stage as one another, interacted with one another far more often and with an understanding of equality. James Almy, Fred Smith, and Bunkio Matsuki all knew each other. Not only did they live within a few short blocks from one another, they also worked with one another.

James Almy provides the link with the two other men. Almy served as a board member of Salem Electric Lighting Company, the company where Fred Smith worked as manager. Smith also personally prepared Almy's department store for lighting. Almy's store was home to Bunkio Matsuki's Japanese Bazaar and the two men worked directly with one another on a variety of business ventures. It is not known if Matsuki and Smith had occasion to interact with one another. As the Almy store was electrified, it is possible that the two men could have become familiar with one another. It can be safely guessed that Fred Smith would have known who Bunkio Matsuki was simply because of Matsuki's celebrity status in Salem, and Matsuki may have known who Smith was because of his important place in modernizing Salem, and because of the professional relationship between Smith and Almy.

A direct connection between any of these three men and their families and the Ropes sisters cannot be made, however. Some safe assumptions may be made linking the Ropes "sissies" (as they were affectionately known) to James Almy and Bunkio Matsuki. James Almy served as a board member of a number of banks and businesses in Salem. In addition to investing in the Salem Electric Lighting Company, Almy also served as a board member for the YMCA. The YMCA in Salem, founded in 1860, was supported by a number of civic-minded reformers. Among these men was Nathaniel Ropes V, the older brother to Mary, Sarah, and Eliza Ropes. Nathaniel Ropes was very involved with the operations of the YMCA and his link to Almy suggests that Almy could have been acquainted with the three sisters.

The Ropes sisters would certainly have known Bunkio Matsuki by name due to his popularity. It is also likely that the sisters would have met him at any number of parties because the Ropes sisters would have been welcomed guests at society parties where Matsuki would also have been a guest. Also, a mutual friend to the Ropes sisters and Matsuki, horticulturist John Robinson, could have offered another opportunity for the four to meet since he made purchases through Matsuki for his home.

Consumption trends likely placed these families in each other's paths as well. The Almy store would have made an ideal space for them to make each other's acquaintance. James Almy's store was the most popular shopping space in the North Shore and, as we will discuss in upcoming chapters, he sought the patronage of the city's upper, middle, and laboring classes. Almy offered a large selection of goods at various prices, which lured most Salemites through his doors at one time or another. With the success of the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store during the 1890s, James Almy himself becomes a trendsetter and purveyor of goods within the city of Salem, generating consumer excitement and demand. Almy sensed changes within the nation's shopping culture and capitalized on them; his creation of Matsuki's Japanese department in his store is the most obvious example of this. It is reasonable to place the Ropes sisters through the doors of Almy's where they were likely to make any number of purchases, including fine fabrics, toiletries, or stationery. Fred Smith was not just Almy's business associate, he also shopped at the store, recording some purchases in his journal from time to time. One can imagine that Matsuki, arriving there almost daily for work, may have

also made occasional purchases there and James Almy, the store's president, was nearly always on the premises.

The developing culture of consumption in America, and in the city of Salem in particular, is key to understanding these three families and the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store and the types of new technologies these families were able to afford and which items became popular purchases within these homes. What drove the need for desired items? And once items were acquired, what practical and social changes took place in these homes as a result of acquired goods?

The acquisition of new household technology and leisure items during this time and what it meant to household labor has been heavily documented through secondary literature. *From Fireplace to Cookstove* (2000) by Priscilla J. Brewer, *More Work for Mother* (1989) and *A Social History of American Technology* (1997), both by Ruth Schwartz Cowan, as well as *American Home Life, 1880-1930* (1992), a collection of essays edited by Jessica H. Foy & Thomas J. Schlereth, all offer important analysis about arising technology and how, and when, it was incorporated into wealthy and middle class homes and provide an important context for this study.²⁷

These authors discuss the changes in household technology, describing how the Industrial Revolution led to modernization of household chores and support for women within the home. These authors outline the benefits and the numerous complications that resulted from the acquisition of new technologies.

Brewer outlines how kitchen technology changes during the nineteenth century permanently altered the workings of the American home. She discusses how the

elimination of the hearth, in preference for the cookstove, changed not only the construction of the home but also the meaning of the home.²⁸ Brewer also explains how these new items operated and, just as importantly, describes the care that new household machinery required; important information for understanding how these inventions, once adopted into a household, had an impact on those required to use and maintain them. In both of her books Cowan describes many of the same problems. She and Brewer both describe how new inventions, once brought into the home, required additional time and labor in order to complete the same tasks; new “time saving devices” resulted in additional chores for women and an increase in their day-to-day housekeeping duties.²⁹

The series of essays edited by Jessica Foy and Thomas Schlereth focus more specifically on incoming technologies and the desire to modernize among families during this time. Other essays describe the business side of new technologies. This collection of essays, as well as Cowan’s *A Social History of American Technology*, offers researchers a better understanding of when technologies were introduced into the homes of America’s elite and middle class. The use of advertisements found throughout women’s magazines such as *The Ladies Home Journal*, and within local newspapers like the *Salem Gazette*, *Salem Evening News*, and *The Boston Globe* indicate the rapidity with which technology entered American homes and changed the lives of their occupants and indicate that Salem residents too were caught up in this newly formed consumer culture.

Jennifer Scanlon’s *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender, and the Promise of Consumer Culture* (1995) offers itself as the only analytical study about consumerism found within *The Ladies Home Journal* from 1883-1922. Scanlon

focuses on this magazine to describe the origin of American consumerism, describing how housekeeping became big business from 1880 until World War I as numerous articles and advertisements sang the praises of new home inventions. *The Ladies Home Journal*, priced to assure affordability to middle class women of the day, included many advertisements meant to entice women to purchase new appliances and other household luxuries. Articles published in this periodical included discussions on experimental architecture, tips on proper home keeping, and offered women a forum to vent about a variety of complaints, chief among them the problems with their domestic servants. The magazine guided women to become the best homemakers they could be while simultaneously distracting them from political issues, such as suffrage and reformist activity, which also occurred during this time.³⁰

Scholarly studies on the working lives of domestics have answered many important questions about the world of domestic labor in America during the Progressive Era. *Seven Days a Week* (1978) by David Katzman and *Serving Women* (1983) by Faye Dudden are both important studies that discuss the role of domestics as they served America's white elite and middle class families.³¹

Dudden describes how a domestic, who once labored alongside the household's mistress as a member of the family, sometimes even sharing the same dinner table, saw her role transformed into that of a stranger who labored alone for the family assisted only (if ever) by other hired domestics. By the middle of the nineteenth century the household domestic was an isolated figure. Dudden argues that household servants, who were once respected by their mistresses and communities, had become a source of frustration and

contempt by those same parties. By the 1880's the role of the domestic servant had become a controversial necessity whose worth was cruelly debated within the pages of women's magazines throughout the 1890's and 1900's.³²

Dudden effectively describes how domestics were treated on the job, pinpointing what inspired them to stay or leave for other professional opportunities. In addition to domestics who left their posts as a result of cruel treatment, Dudden describes how some of these women jumped from employment at one house to another in search for higher wages, while others left domestic employment altogether for opportunities in factories or to serve as clerks within newly emerging department stores.³³

Katzman focuses on race and class when examining the role of domestic servants at the turn of the twentieth century. Katzman links the experiences of domestics (as reported by Lucy Maynard Salmon's 1890 Vassar College survey³⁴) to the heavily documented "servant problem" of the day, discussing the transient quality of many domestics and their desire for more pay though he tends to lose touch with the realities of domestic work as it was experienced by the workers.

Both Katzman and Dudden identify for readers the hard lives of domestics, outlining their occupation as one of drudgery and acknowledging that other professions required less work and allowed for more free time.

While these historians have, through their studies, effectively recorded how technology was developed and used within individual homes, how advertising fueled the consumption of technology and other luxury items, and how domestic service was used

within upper and middle class households, no study has yet sought to identify how technology was consumed and used within actual individual households.

The material choices made by the Ropes, Smith, and Matsuki families become important in understanding how commercial changes were made in a national market. The Ropes family's choice to modernize their home in Salem becomes the American ideal of leisure and gentility that middle class families come to desire. The Smith and Matsuki families seek the comforts enjoyed by the Ropes family, while the materiality of their own lifestyles elicited copying from the laboring class. Although the laboring classes were not in a position to acquire large household items, they did seek lesser items for personal enjoyment. The Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn store became an important spot for all three classes to converge as they sought modernity during America's Progressive Era.

Identifying how technological changes swept through individual homes offers a unique perspective on Victorian home life not only in Salem but also in the whole of the United States. As we take a close look at how the Ropes, Almy, Smith, and Matsuki households acquired and used new objects in their homes, and determine how these purchases defined their class within the city of Salem, we will be able to establish more easily how the consumption of goods and technology established a new standard of living within Salem and throughout the nation. How Americans spent their money from 1890-1914 not only altered the lives of individuals and their households, but also established and more easily defined the nation's middle class, and emboldened the laboring classes to also seek luxury goods and leisure items. Strong primary sources, including journals,

advertising literature, financial records, and in some cases the homes themselves, tell the story of the Ropes, Almy, Smith, and Matsuki families and reveal how their lives changed through the consumption of household goods and modern utilities.

¹ William R. Leach, "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1895-1925," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Sept., 1894): p. 327.

² Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 14-15.

³ Ruth Schwartz Cowan argues that these alleged "time saving devices" actually resulted in increased work for women in the home. See *More Work for Mother* (London: Free Association Press, 1989).

⁴ Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), pp. 155-163.

⁵ Susan Benson defines "the 'palace of consumption' as the world in which Bourgeois gentility and lavish service meet the departments store." See *Counter Culture: Saleswoman, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940*. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 81.

⁶ Leach, p. 327.

⁷ Ibid and Benson, p. 3 speaks about class mobility through consumption, as does Peter Stearns, who argues that purchasing power provided an emotional meaning to shoppers who made purchases to become more accepted into a higher class. Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumption: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (March., 1997), p. 112.

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Benson, p. 177.

¹⁰ Robert D. Tamlia, "World's Fairs and the Department Store 1800s to 1930s," (available online at <http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/charm/dept.store.pdf>, accessed on August 16, 2009) p. 229.

¹¹ Russell Lewis, "Everything Under One Roof: World's Fairs and the Department Stores in Paris and Chicago," *Chicago History*, Vol. 12, No.2 (Fall 1983), pp. 28-31.

¹² Ibid and Tamlia, p. 234.

¹³ Tamlia

¹⁴ Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Book of the Fair* (The Bancroft Company: Chicago and San Francisco, 1893), pp. 341-397.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Lewis, p. 31.

¹⁷ Phil Patton, "Sell the Cookstove if Necessary, but Come to the Fair," *Smithsonian*, (June 1993), p. 5.

¹⁸ As is explained by Patton, p. 5 and Tamlia, p. 234.

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- ¹⁹ Benson, p. 12.
- ²⁰ Ibid, pp. 12-13.
- ²¹ "Cloaking Goods," *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899*.
- ²² *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899*.
- ²³ *Fred S. Smith Diaries*, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.
- ²⁴ Nearly a dozen named and unnamed domestics are mentioned throughout Smith's diaries dated from 1890-1914 (He and his wife continued to hire domestic help until his death in 1940). *Fred S. Smith Diaries* (throughout).
- ²⁵ Today known as Kawisuwa and located about fifty miles southeast of Nagano, Japan.
- ²⁶ "A Pleasing Novelty": *Bunkio Matsuki and the Japan Craze in Victorian Salem* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 1993), p. 80.
- ²⁷ Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, eds., *American Home Life, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992).
- ²⁸ Brewer, pp 96-98.
- ²⁹ More Work for Mother, pp. 56-57. Cowan argues that acquired technology resulted in more work for women because new machinery required the use of a single operator, and women no longer pooled their energies together to complete chores (such as laundry, or food preservation, for example).
- ³⁰ Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender, and the Promise of Consumer Culture* (New York and London: Routledge Press, 1995).
- ³¹ See Dudden and David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1978).
- ³² Various articles within *The Ladies Home Journal* and *Harper's Bazaar* dated between the years 1890-1914 will provide this information and are cited as used in upcoming chapters.
- ³³ Dudden, pp. 55-60.
- ³⁴ See data throughout Lucy Salmon, *Domestic Service* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 19903).

CHAPTER 1

CALLING SALEM HOME

As the nineteenth century passed to the twentieth, the streets of Salem bustled with a large number of business houses; Salem had once again become a commercial destination and a model of modernity on Boston's North Shore. A short walk in Salem's downtown area revealed store after store offering ready-made clothing, household appliances, decorative goods, and leisure items. These numerous storefronts stood to Salemites as a testament of renewed commercial success in a city whose wealth had been carefully built through mercantile trade with China and India during the previous century.

Salem was not only the site of commercial renewal, but also the evolution of neighborhoods defined by material culture and status in a changing community. The city first blossomed as a bustling seaport in post-Revolutionary America, making many of its inhabitants comfortable or rich. The War of 1812 decimated Salem's maritime community, causing the city's economy to stagnate until a rebirth of commercial success was seen through late nineteenth century shop keeping. Salem in the late eighteenth century thrived on a vibrant maritime economy and trade with China and India. While shipping had caused the city's post-Revolutionary economy to crumble, less than a

hundred years later, Salem pulsed with financial success in the form of the new department store.

The rise of Salem as a commercial center coincides with the development of class distinctions based on a uniquely American mix of inherited wealth, new wealth, genealogy, education, ethnicity, and materiality.

Prior to the American Revolution, Salem was one of the most heavily populated towns in Massachusetts. Typical of many New England seaside towns, locals used their natural resources to make their living. Salem's landscape includes significant access to coastline, and during colonial times abundant forests, making it an attractive home to fishermen and ship builders. Cod teemed in the ocean off Salem's shore and were easily caught by fleets of fishermen who, returning with their catch, preserved their fish in the sun on Winter Island, and then sold their catch to local residents and Salem merchants. These merchants, barred by the British from trading to ports not under British control, sold their goods to the British West Indies or the Southern colonies. Northerners looked to trade for coffee, lemons, molasses, sugar, and rum--items they had limited access to--and did so by bartering cod, tar, shingles, and ship making materials.¹

In terms of the demographics, pre-Revolutionary Salem was the largest town in Essex County and its residents were of English descent and members of the laboring class. The town was home to a small merchant class, however, which remained enthusiastically loyal to the English Crown. This small group of wealthy merchants dominated the city's politics until the American Revolution ousted them from the town.² With the issuing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Salem's loyalists were

driven from the town and sought refuge in England or Canada. The Revolution effectively destroyed the wealth of Salem loyalists who fled and annihilated economic prospects for those who remained.³

On the other hand, merchants who embraced the rebels' cause became pivotal in reshaping the town as well as their own fiscal destiny. Because many of the prewar elites remained loyal to the Crown, their departure allowed for the rise of a new ruling class. Between the years 1776 and 1788, thirty-nine "new elites" rose to influential status in Salem and of these men thirty-five possessed significant connections to privateering during the war.⁴

At the onset of the war Salem's middling merchants outfitted their merchant ships as privateering vessels and sent them out to wreak havoc on British shipping. Privateering offered the young patriot the chance to make a fortune while fighting for his country.⁵ As a result of patriotic sentiment, young men began leaving their homes throughout New England to sign aboard privateering vessels in Boston and Salem. Advertisements in newspapers of the time tempted youngsters to join their ranks. They offered, for example,

An Invitation to all brave Seamen and Marines,
Who have inclination to serve their country
And make their Fortunes.

Salem merchants employed nearly three thousand men as privateers during the war.⁶

Throughout the war "Salem District," a reference to the pooled resources of the towns of Danvers, Beverly and Salem, had the largest fleet of privateers operating in the united colonies and the area soon became known as a "privateering hub."⁷ Salem District

had about fifty vessels operating against the British at any given time. These privateers stretched their sea legs north to the Grand Banks, south to the West Indies, and east to the English Channel. During the war Massachusetts operated 1,697 privateering vessels, and of this number 626 called Salem home. Of Salem's 626 vessels, a wealthy Salem merchant, Elias Hasket Derby, owned nearly a hundred, and his ships were involved in half the entire profits seized by Essex County during the war!⁸ Throughout the war, Derby's ships caught 144 British ships while losing only nineteen to their British foes.

Privateering was an effective tool in crippling the British shipping industry at a time when a blossoming nation lacked a navy to oppose British ships. At the same time, because of their declaration of war, Americans could no longer obtain luxury goods from Britain and its territories, despite the fact that they were highly desired within America. In answer to these problems, innovative privateers sent ships to the French West Indies gathering sugar, molasses, cotton, and rum, among other prized items. In addition to trading for supplies, these ships offered a secondary benefit; privateers positioned themselves to overtake English ships encountered along their trade route. The cargo of returning ships found immediate markets on Cape Cod, Boston, and Cape Ann.⁹

The success of privateering in Salem was not typical of that experienced by most merchants in the united colonies during the American Revolution. Generally, privateering was not a profitable venture and many merchants destroyed their fleets by involving themselves in privateering. When peace came in 1783, merchants throughout the young United States were left with the unhappy realization that all or a part of their fleet had been destroyed and that those vessels that remained were unfit for trading

voyages.¹⁰ The result of this was an inability to engage in lucrative overseas trade, further crippling their recovery prospects. Some of the largest ports of the colonies stagnated as a result of privateering attempts during the war, including New York and Philadelphia. Even other Massachusetts maritime communities lacked the success that Salem found. When Massachusetts plunged into depression after the Revolution, Salem alone benefited from a healthy maritime economy and an economic boom. Even the former economic powerhouses of Boston and Newburyport struggled to stay afloat.¹¹

When peace came at last, American merchants were barred from trade in ports throughout the British Empire. Clearly this must have been debilitating to some, while others willingly conducted trade wherever their ships and the prevailing winds could take them. Without having to pay tax to King George, their potential for profit skyrocketed, and so too did their willingness to take risks. Privateers in Salem quickly reinvested money into their ships and into eastern voyages with the hope of greater economic gains.

At the conclusion of the war, Elias Hasket Derby reoutfitted one of his most successful privateering ships, *The Grand Turk*, as a merchant ship and sent it on a number of trading voyages.¹² In 1784, he sent *The Grand Turk* on a voyage to Africa. Derby told his ship's captain, Jonathan Ingersoll, to obtain tea, a sorely missed commodity in the colonies. Unfortunately, once in Africa, Ingersoll could not find any profitable exchanges. By chance, the *Turk* met with the *Empress of China*, an American ship from Philadelphia anchored off the Cape of Good Hope on its return trip from China. Captain Ingersoll met with the *Empress's* captain and crew and traded some of his goods for Chinese tea, sateen, and nankeens.¹³ In addition to the items exchanged with the

Empress, Ingersoll also heard of and saw first hand the items available to those willing to travel to China.

When *The Grand Turk* returned to Salem in July of 1785, it arrived with 164 chests of tea, in addition to other goods bartered from the *Empress*. The tea and fabrics elicited great excitement in the town and the cargo of the *Turk* returned a hefty profit.¹⁴

In December of that same year, Derby sent out the *Turk* on its next voyage, this time under the authority of a new captain, Ebenezer West. The *Turk*, loaded again with a variety of American goods from Carolina rice and Virginia tobacco to New England earthenware and ginseng¹⁵ was instructed to sail to the Ile de France, a small island off the coast of Madagascar. West was permitted to sail to China only as a last resort; Derby remained wary of sending his ship to China because no American ship besides the *Empress* had successfully sailed beyond the Cape of Good Hope.

Upon arriving in South Africa and the Ile de France Captain West found trading opportunities lackluster and opted to travel on to China where he found immediate success.¹⁶ When the *Turk* returned to Salem the captain and crew were greeted with celebration and curiosity. Derby's *Turk* was the third American ship to reach China and with his success other Salem merchants began making that same slow journey to the Far East.¹⁷ Gradually other Salem merchants sent their own vessels to China and trade connections were established in India as well. From 1785-1807 Salem ship owners planned regular trips to China and India. These numerous voyages resulted in the collection of individual wealth and communal opportunity. The riches brought back to the town from eastern trade penetrated the entire town, transforming it from a bustling

fishing town to a merchant city on a par with other great American ports. Salem became a worldwide destination, playing host to dignitaries and presidents. Stores lined Essex Street and the wharves sold Chinese and Indian imports. The city soon adopted a nickname, which remarked on its shipping success and burgeoning artist talent—visitors came to call the city the “Venice of the West.”¹⁸

Salem avoided the economic crises endured by most other communities after the American Revolution because of its international trade. While farmers in western Massachusetts rioted due to poverty, Salem’s almshouses remained nearly empty and unemployment almost nonexistent.¹⁹ So much money is said to have entered Salem’s ports in the decade after the Revolution that ninety-two percent of the young Republic’s entire war debt is believed to have been paid off by custom duties collected from Salem ships alone!²⁰

With this influx of wealth, Salem’s new gentlemen looked to surround themselves with finer things. Their former homes, originally located on the long wharves close to where they conducted their business, grew far less appealing. Salem’s new moneyed elite looked to distance themselves from their former neighborhoods in “Knocker’s Point,” the area of Salem along the wharves where they neighbored sailors and shipbuilding yards, and formed some of the city’s first obvious geographical class barriers.²¹

Moving westward away from the wharves, Salem’s wealthy merchants built their homes in a section of Salem now known as the McIntire District. Named after Samuel McIntire, a well-respected local architect who designed and built a number of the

neighborhood's homes and public buildings, the construction of the new community took place between 1796 and 1805. The district includes Broad, Chestnut, Essex, and Federal streets [see maps 2, 9], and occupies farmland once belonging to Timothy Pickering, a Salem native who served as George Washington's Secretary of State. In addition to homes, McIntire designed and built a church and public building used as a dance hall and meeting house.

The South Congregational Church and Hamilton Hall, both located on Chestnut Street, became important meeting places for Salem's wealthy citizens. Hamilton Hall was particularly important to the neighborhood. Social events, concerts, and dances brought neighbors together in this new public space. Not all residents approved of the events held in the function hall, however. South Church minister Dr. Francis Hopkins remarked in his journal that his congregants were "dancing their souls to hell" as they lined up "back-to-back and breast-to-breast."²² With the building of the new neighborhood wealthy merchants created a community to live, worship, and socialize in that remained entirely removed from the city's laboring class.

Salem's seafaring success slowed as a result of Jefferson's embargo and although the War of 1812 saw a resurgence of privateering activity within Essex County it proved far less profitable than it had been during the American Revolution.²³ Only Salem's wealthiest merchants remained unscathed by mercantile changes while others went bankrupt.²⁴ Once America made peace again with Britain, Salem's narrow and shallow harbor, a harbor chosen during Revolutionary times because of the natural protection it offered its ships in port, fell out of favor and shippers came to prefer ports outside of

Salem. As Salem's maritime success slowed to a standstill, enterprising persons sought investments outside the maritime community.

In the decades following the War of 1812, Salem shifted from its dependence on maritime business to industry. Like those in many other northern towns its laborers toiled in cotton mills and leather tanneries. Salem's leather industry, originally founded about 1800, grew considerably in the following few decades. Tanneries also sprung up in northwest Salem near the Peabody town line abutting Peabody's own successful tanneries. This area of Salem, known as Blubber Hollow due to processing techniques, became one of Salem's largest industrial centers during the nineteenth century. In 1850 Salem welcomed the opening of the Naumkeag Cotton Mill, which built its factory on the eastern bank of Salem harbor and produced a variety of textiles sold locally and nationally. While these factories created some white-collar jobs in management and bookkeeping, the factory also employed nearly twenty-five hundred skilled and unskilled laborers.²⁵

Local townspeople found work in the city's factories while industry also drew immigration to the town. Irish, French-Canadian, and Polish laborers began arriving in large numbers throughout the nineteenth century, settling in and expanding the tenement area of Salem known as the "Point" [see map 1, 2, 3, 4]. The Irish first began arriving in Salem during the 1830s, only two decades before the famine in Ireland brought mass immigration of the Irish to the United States. In the 1850s French-Canadian immigrants arrived, building churches and schools, and expanding the Point area of Salem to the mill's existing tenement housing. The Polish began to arrive in Salem during the 1870s,

settling the eastern side of Derby Street past the city's once bustling wharves and northward to Essex Street along Collins Cove. New arrivals found work in factories or employment in private households.²⁶

The city's ever-growing population generated the opening of more and more stores. Essex Street, home to both residential and commercial properties, exploded with new stores. From about 1840 until 1890 this was the city's main marketplace where citizens found a variety of goods. Once the longest street in Salem, Essex Street cut across downtown Salem, connecting Collins Cove to the main road into Boston. The real success of Salem businessmen would not be known until the 1880s, however, when merchandise became more easily accessible to middle and laboring classes with varying amounts of disposable income.

By the 1890s Salem stores brimmed with new merchandise. Stores that carried ready-made clothing and household goods found the most success as families happily filled their homes with store-bought objects. Purchases affected consumers in a number of ways. Although purchases were primarily meant to improve the quality of their home life, they sometimes achieved an emotional link to a higher class; objects once considered off limits to them were now more easily afforded by them.²⁷

By 1895, Salem was a self-proclaimed shopping hub of the North Shore, attracting not only Salem's residents but those of neighboring communities who traveled to shop in Salem rather than making longer trips to Boston. To reach downtown Salem, most residents walked or rode trolleys into town. Wealthier consumers used telephones to call in orders on store credit and had items delivered directly to their homes.

In 1867, James Fergus Almy and two associates, C.S. Clark and Nathaniel Wiggin, purchased the Derby Farm from Elias Haskett Derby's heirs. This hundred-plus acres of the Derby Farm located along Lafayette Street connected downtown Salem to the nearby towns of Marblehead, Swampscott, and Lynn. The property was divided into streets and house lots and offered for sale to the public. The town celebrated the development of this area as they anticipated that it would bring new (and desirable) residents to Salem, enlarging the population of the city, and "increasing the amount of taxes coming into the town's treasury."²⁸ Although some homes were built on Lafayette Street before the sale of the Derby Farm in 1840, the larger development of the land did not take place until after the farm was sold to Almy and his associates. This transaction prompted the construction of new homes, generating a larger impact on the city than an increase in tax revenue alone.

Within thirty years this became home to a handful of middle class men and their families. By the 1880s south Salem was the city's newly emerging middle class neighborhood. The patriarchs worked as bank tellers, grocers, office clerks, lawyers, artists and photographers, and merchants and importers, while their wives worked to create a warm home life.²⁹ Homes built in this area, some of which still stand today, reflect a variety of architectural styles popularized in women's magazines throughout that time.³⁰ While the upper middle class built their homes on the main street, those in the mid and lower middle class purchased land for homes on the side streets connecting Lafayette Street to Canal Street. Whereas older Salem neighborhoods boasted historical gems of Federal and colonial gothic design, south Salem residents erected homes in the Colonial,

Greek, and Gothic Revivals or constructed smaller homes with whimsical flourishes such as Queen Anne or Bungalow designs.

Perhaps more important than the building of these middle class homes, however, are the objects their occupants chose to put in them. Families filled their houses with modern household technology as well as luxury and leisure items. Middle class families hired live-in domestic servants who not only helped with household tasks but further defined their employer's social position to themselves and their neighbors.

Class, specifically our understanding of the "middle class," in late Victorian America can be difficult to understand or define. The American middle class during this time was just beginning to form as a result of increased commercialization and the establishment of a high number of white-collar jobs.³¹ For the purpose of the people and the community of Salem, "class" was a function of both wealth and connection to Salem's past. In this study we will define class in the following terms. Families whose wealth derived from inheritance or strong investments, and who made their home within the city's McIntire District were seen as Salem's elite. The wealth of these families was often tied to the maritime successes of previous generations, as was the case with the Ropes sisters, who represent this class in Salem.

Men and women who supported their families through manual labor were the city's laboring class, occupied in factory work, skilled crafts, and domestic servants. The city's laboring class consisted of Salem natives and newly arrived immigrants and their descendants.

Although the issue of class in Salem never appeared as overt strife, economic divisions were visible throughout the town's history, and the remnants of that history are apparent in the geographical make-up of the city today. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Salem's elite remained in residence in the McIntire District, its laboring classes settled northeast and west of Salem Harbor, and the middle class built their own new neighborhood in south Salem.³² The city's class lines were strictly drawn.

Geographically, the families considered in this study lived according to the city's class divisions. The wealthy Ropes sisters resided in their family home in the McIntire District. James Almy, a wealthy merchant, lived close to his shop near Essex Street until his great commercial success warranted a move to Lafayette Street, where many of his upper middle class brethren had built their homes. Bunkio Matsuki and Fred Smith both built and lived in homes in south Salem's middle class neighborhood; residing on Laurel and Piedmont Street respectively, the side streets that connected Lafayette Street to Canal Street. Matsuki built a handsome Japanese-inspired bungalow that awed Salemites, while the Smith family started out in a modest duplex only a short block away.

In these homes, each family modernized and responded to the new household technologies and products that expressed their place and aspirations in Salem society. The Ropes sisters, Sarah, Eliza, and Mary, lived in a mansion their family had occupied for four generations. The Ropes sisters, all unwed and supported by inheritance and shrewd investments, made massive renovations to their Essex Street home in 1894. Among the most important of these renovations was the addition of an ell holding a fully

modernized kitchen. The house was also outfitted with electricity, central heating, and plumbing during this year.

James Almy originally lived close to his shop off Essex Street but in 1896 he built a grand home on Lafayette Street. Almy was a self made man who created a business empire by establishing the North Shore's first department store, Almy, Bigelow & Washburn.

The numerous domestics working in the homes of these four families are central to the telling of this story. Though living in the homes of their employers, they would have otherwise found their homes in the working class sections of town. Although the turnover of domestics in some of these households makes it difficult to identify all the women who worked for these four families, it is known that a large number of the domestics were Irish or French Canadian, while a few others were local Salem girls, and one was a Japanese immigrant. For working class men and women, domestic service and factory work were the two most important categories of labor in Salem during this time; they were also two of the most difficult, unforgiving, low paying, and sometimes dangerous jobs available.

In 1886, the same year as the infamous Haymarket Strike in Chicago, Salem tanners walked off the job to protest unfair hours and wages. Workers saw their pay decrease during the Civil War and tannery owners cut pay to cushion the financial loss felt by their businesses. By the 1880s tannery workers labored sixty-six hours a week in dangerous conditions. In 1885 the Knights of Labor organized local tanneries in Salem and Peabody and successfully negotiated a slight increase in wages for workers by

threatening to strike. The following year the Knights of Labor made additional demands, asking for a fifty-nine hour workweek and a new pay scale meant to compensate workers who worked in the factories' most dangerous jobs. Tannery men were known to lose their fingers, limbs, and lives while using heavy machinery in the factories. Salem and Peabody tannery owners met to discuss their options but on July 9th they rejected the union's demands. Additionally, business owners informed workers that they would no longer bargain with the union and threatened to employ men who refused membership in the union and who promised not to strike; business owners resolved to "run our business without dictation."³³

In response, fifteen hundred workers walked off their jobs, leaving their owners to enter their own factory floors and finish processing abandoned hides. Business owners called in strikebreakers from Maine and the Canadian Maritimes who joined the small number of local workers who had stayed on the job refusing to strike. Strikers turned violent in August, attacking boarding houses where strikebreakers lived, and nonunion workers suffered at the hands of violent mobs. The strike found little local sympathy due largely to the violence. The *Salem Evening News* spoke negatively about strikers and the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston excommunicated Catholic members of the Knights of Labor.

Some strikers, discouraged by their violent colleagues, broke their strike and return to work. As the strike weakened, the union lost ground with factory owners and union members alike and attempted to negotiate to end the strike in July and again in September. Business owners, aware that they had gained the upper hand, refused to give

in to the union during either meeting and the strike continued until Thanksgiving day. On November 29th a mob overtook a trolley car and beat three nonunion workers so severely that they had to be hospitalized. Following this last act of violence, the majority of strikers returned to work.³⁴

Possibly due to the violent nature of this strike, few labor issues warranted the attention of Salemites during the following two decades. There were no strikes in Salem factories during this time and only occasional articles in the *Salem Evening News* suggested frustration with work conditions.

In 1894, for example, three Salem electricians quit their jobs after they unsuccessfully sought an additional fifty cents per week to ride the trolley to their assigned work posts. The title of the article in the *Salem Evening News* spit “Incipit Strike” but the dispute never amounted to anything once the men resigned. Although Salem’s Electric Lighting Company employed these men, as well as operating and owning Salem’s trolley service, the electricians were required to pay for their own transportation between work points.³⁵ Dissatisfaction in the workplace during this time is even more easily understood in the world of domestic service, although because so few domestics recorded their experiences, their voice is hardly heard.

It is not clear how many domestic servants were employed in Salem households at the turn of the century. Salem’s moneyed elite and growing middle class maintained a need for domestics. Newspaper postings in the *Salem Evening News* list dozens of requests for domestic servants weekly from 1890-1914. Also, local employment services advertised domestic help to families in need of household help.³⁶

Tasks ascribed to domestics varied depending upon the class of home they worked. Wealthier homeowners relied on their domestics to complete *all* household tasks from cooking to laundry. Housewives in middle class homes varied in their reliance on domestics. Some mistresses required their domestics to do more than others. Typically the wealthier middle class families relied on their domestic servants more, whereas in less wealthy middle class homes, job requirements varied depending upon what duties housewives were willing to perform themselves. Cooking and childcare frequently fell into the domain of the housewife. Many women were encouraged by advice literature to perform these tasks on their own in order to safeguard their families from inferior cooking or child-rearing techniques. “Experts” felt that mothers would cook and care for their own children better than a paid servant would.³⁷ Live-in domestic often became responsible for household chores their mistresses found undesirable, such as sweeping and mopping, rug beating, washing walls to remove soot build-up (be it from cooking or lighting apparatus), and laundry.³⁸

Sorting through “Female Help Wanted” ads placed in the *Salem Evening News* from 1890-1914, some common requirements arise. “Experienced” or “competent girls with excellent references” top the list. The demand for a “Respectable Protestant” is one frequently repeated, especially when the job included childcare. The request for a “middle-aged woman” or “widow” is common as well. The language prospective employers chose to use when seeking employees indicate common complaints shared by homeowners about domestic service during this time.

Employers often complained of “unskilled” domestics whom they discharged for being untidy or simply incompetent. However, most employers felt that it was not in their interest to train new domestics due to their own time constraints and general inconvenience. They also feared that domestics, once trained, would leave their employment for a more lucrative position.³⁹

Prospective employers agreed to “try” help for several days to determine their worth; candidates who met approval were awarded the job, while those who did not were told to go.⁴⁰ A home’s preference for a “middle-aged” woman or “widow” indicates the desire for experienced staff who would be more likely to stay on at their home for an extended period of time. Employers expected younger domestics to be more transient and likely to move from home to home before marrying and beginning their own families. By hiring an older woman, employers felt that they could avoid the high turnover rate common in the industry—the high turnover likely prompted by their dismissive, and sometimes hostile, work environments.

Advertisements for “Protestant girls” reflected stereotypes and prejudices commonly heard within the world of domestic employment. With Salem’s large Irish and French-Canadian population, as well as its growing Polish community, Catholicism was also growing in Salem. During the 1850s Irish Catholics were accused of poisoning the food of their Protestant employers and attempting to convert children to Catholicism. Reports from New York in the following decade accused domestics of secretly baptizing the children and infants in their charge.⁴¹ Irish domestics were also charged with ineptitude. Employers believed them to be inferior housekeepers with no natural skill. A

nasty caricature arose in newspapers and women's magazines of the ignorant "Irish Bridget" who washed her feet in the soup tureen or looked through a door's keyhole to greet guests.⁴² Some households were simply unwilling to employ Irish domestics.

Despite this, the Irish made up a large percentage of domestics largely due to their willingness to work in the field. While most American women believed domestic service to be beneath them, and sought office or clerical jobs, the Irish chose to continue working in private homes. Domestic service was appealing to them because it guaranteed them room and board and allowed them enough money to send to their families. Since many of these women were already removed from their family and friends, they complained little about their own lack of personal time or privacy.⁴³

Some employers hired the Irish because they could not find other domestics, while others swore by them, claiming them to be natural childcare givers (due largely to their upbringing as members of large families). Other employers believed the Irish to be chaste because of their strong Catholic faiths and believed that they would be less distracted by social activities or vice.⁴⁴

For a number of reasons, by the 1890s domestic service was viewed as an unstable workforce. In addition to domestics who left their posts as a result of cruel treatment, some women jumped from employment at one house to another seeking higher wages. Others left domestic service altogether, seeking opportunities in factories or to work as clerks within newly emerging department stores.⁴⁵

The families considered in this study employed domestic servants in their homes. Although the specifics of service in these homes will be addressed in the following

chapters, it is important to note here that their use of domestic labor confirms a portion of their class identity and makes domestic labor an important discussion.

The Ropes sisters kept two live-in servants, both Irish-born women who remained in service to the family until the death of the last sister in 1907. The Matsuki family hired a Japanese woman to serve as their family's domestic for a short time but later relied on local women to complete household tasks. The Smith family struggled to secure domestic help as their domestics came and went and give us a more common impression of domestic service in Salem (and indeed America) at the turn of the twentieth century.

Despite obvious social and class distinctions, many of Salem's wealthy and middle class families interacted with one another in a variety of ways. The domestics living in the homes of their wealthy or middle class employers demonstrate the most obvious link between these three classes. The middle class families, on the same societal stage, interacted with one another far more often and with an understanding of equality. James Almy, Fred Smith, and Bunkio Matsuki all knew each other. Not only did they live within a few short blocks from one another, they also worked and socialized together.

Mary, Sarah, and Eliza Ropes appear to historians as unpretentious women despite their many advantages. The three women never married and surrounded themselves with friends and engaged in a number of intellectual pursuits. They inherited their home and a sizeable fortune from their brother, which allowed them to live out their lives in style and comfort. The Ropes sisters made a number of impressive renovations to

their home, which fully modernized it, to the awe of friends and neighbors. The Ropes sisters were born into riches and died with their wealth very much preserved and represent Salem's modernizing elite.

All four families considered for this study live in neighborhoods defined by their status and their acquisition of material culture. The Ropes sisters, the wealthiest of our four families, remain in the city's oldest and wealthiest neighborhood, the McIntire District. James Almy, a member of Salem's nouveau riche, occupies a new home on Lafayette Street in Salem, while Fred Smith and Bunkio Matsuki, both of whom headed middle class families, occupy comfortable bungalows in Salem's rising middle class community in south Salem. Aside from the Ropes sisters, whose substantial wealth and genealogy guaranteed them prominent social standing in Salem, the Almy, Smith, and Matsuki families sought other means to achieve class mobility. Salem's rise as a commercial center overlaps with the development of class distinctions based upon the interplay of inherited wealth, new wealth, genealogy, education, ethnicity, and material desires and at Salem's new department store, Almy's, the wealthy, middle, and laboring classes happily flexed their purchasing power.⁴⁶

¹ Ronald Tagney, *The World Turned Upside Down: Essex County During America's Turbulent Years, 1763-1790* (West Newbury: Essex County History, 1989), p. 1.

² For more information about pre-Revolutionary Salem see Samuel Eliot Morrison, *The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 1763-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1979), pp. 1-150.

³ Ibid, p. 616.

⁴ Richard J. Morris, "Redefining the Economic Elite in Salem, Massachusetts, 1759-1799: A Tale of Evolution not Revolution," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 4. (December, 2000), p. 613.

⁵ Sidney G. Morse, "The Yankee Privateersman of 1776," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 17, no.1 (March, 1944), p. 71.

⁶ Salem District, including the towns of Salem, Danvers, and Beverly, employed 3,000 privateersman during the Revolutionary War. Tagney text, p. 19.

⁷ Ibid, p. 233

⁸ Ibid, p. 397. This information can also be found sprinkled throughout the *Salem Register* (later the *Salem Gazette*) dating 1779-1781. The Tagney book offers a concise discussion of the facts, however.

⁹ Robert E. Peabody, ed., *The Log of the Grand Turk* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), p. 6.

¹⁰ Benjamin W. Labaree. *Patriots and Partisans: The Merchants of Newburyport, 1764-1815* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975), p. 42.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² See Peabody for travel diaries, cargo excerpts, and related information about *The Grand Turk's* numerous voyages. Robert E. Peabody, ed., *The Log of the Grand Turk* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926).

¹³ Philip C. F. Smith, *The Empress of China* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Maritime Museum, 1984), pp. 204-205.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 57.

¹⁵ *E.H. Derby Account Book (1739-1799). Outgoing Cargoes 1785-1796*. Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

¹⁶ The ship *Hope*, the second American ship to reach China, was at this time en route to China but her fate was not yet known. For information about the *Turk's* journey to China and the experiences of her crew while in China see Daniel Henderson, *Yankee Ships in China Seas* (New York: Hastings House, 1946), pp. 25-34.

¹⁷ *The Empress of China* (New York City) reached China first in 1784 and the ship *Hope* (Philadelphia) reached China in 1785 only a few months before the *Grand Turk* had. See Phillip Chadwick Foster Smith, *The Empress of China* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985) for more information about these two voyages.

¹⁸ Salem's post-revolutionary appreciation for art is almost entirely linked with the carvings and architectural work of Samuel McIntire. Samuel McIntire was well regarded by his Salem patrons and history has named him one of America's most skilled artists and architects. Entirely self-taught, Samuel McIntire never left Essex County. He submitted plans for the Capitol Building in Washington after the American Revolution, which were declined because Thomas Jefferson believed the proposal looked too aristocratic. Salem remains home to a dozen surviving structures designed and built by him. For more about Samuel McIntire and his important contribution to the city of Salem see Dean T. Lahikainen, *Samuel McIntire: Carving An American Style* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 2007).

¹⁹ Residents and migrant workers were able to find employment in shipbuilding or house building. Douglas Lamar Jones, "The Strolling Poor: Transiency in Eighteenth Century Massachusetts," *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 8. No. 3 (Spring, 1975), pp. 37-38.

²⁰ James Duncan Phillips, "Jefferson's 'Wicked Tyrannical Embargo'," *The New England Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (December 1945), p. 467.

²¹ For more see James Duncan Phillips, *Salem and the Indies*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947).

²² Lahikainen, p. 140.

²³ Jefferson's embargo prevented any American ships from sailing for fear that the ships would be commandeered by British privateers. As a result of this, Salem merchants were unable to make planned voyages to China and India and in the following few years Jefferson's embargo completely handicapped Salem's shipping industry. See "Jefferson's 'Wicked Tyrannical Embargo'."

²⁴ Jerathmiel Peirce was among some of Salem families to go bankrupt after the War of 1812. When war broke out between America and Britain for the second time, Peirce's ship, the *Friendship*, was docked on the Thames and overtaken by British privateers. Additional losses found him bankrupt by 1827 and he had to sell his grand Federal mansion that Samuel McIntire built for him in 1783, as well as many of his possessions. The house was purchased by family friends and was left to Peirce's daughter by them upon their deaths. For more about the *Friendship* see John Frayler, *Friendship: The World of a Salem East Indiaman, 1797-1813* (National Parks Service: Eastern National, 1998). For more about Jerathmiel Peirce see Gerald W.R. Ward, *The Peirce-Nichols House* (Salem: Essex Institute Press, 1976).

²⁵ The leather industry employed about two thousand skilled and unskilled laborers while the cotton mill employed about five thousand laborers during this time. See Clive Jarvis, *The Story of Pequot: Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co.*, (Boston: The Berkeley Press, publication undated) and Jim McAllister, *Salem: From Naumkeag to Witch City* (Beverly, MA: Commonwealth Editions, 2000), p. 85.

²⁶ Census records show that the Irish arrived in large numbers first, followed by French-Canadians and lastly Polish immigrants. There are almost no writings about immigration to Salem available at this time. Census and church records offer our best understanding of immigration to Salem. The National Parks Service is currently working on a history of Salem immigration, which is slated for publication in Spring 2010. Parks Service historian Emily Murphy provided some of the above information.

²⁷ Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (March, 1977), p. 112.

²⁸ Almy, Bigelow & Washburn. *Fifty Years, 1858-1908*. Salem, 1908. Peabody Essex Museum, Phillips Library.

²⁹ To learn more about the men and the homes they built in the Lafayette Street area of south Salem see Claire D. Johnson, "Domestic Architecture in Victorian Salem: A Lafayette Sampling," *Essex Institute Historical Collections 115* (1979): 172-182.

³⁰ See Candace M. Voltz essay published in Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, ed., *American Home Life, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pp. 25-36.

³¹ Elaine S. Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 14-19.

³² A small number of Salem's middle class began building homes northwest of the North River toward the town of Danvers but larger development in this area did not begin until after the first World War.

³³ See Jim McAllister, *Salem: From Naumkeag to Witch City* (Commonwealth Editions: Beverly, Massachusetts, 2000), p. 84-87, for a basic overview. Numerous articles in the *Salem Evening News* from July to November 1886 offer a more vivid account of Salem's leather strike and the violence that followed.

³⁴ "Incipit Strike," *Salem Evening News*, March 18, 1893. Interestingly, Fred Smith (president of the Salem Electric Lighting Company who is discussed at length in Chapter 4 of this paper) clipped out and pasted this article into his diary without any written comment about events. See *S. Fred Smith, Diary #5*.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See, for instance, two newspaper articles clipped and pasted into Fred Smith's journal dated May 16, 1896 and July 19, 1896. *S. Fred Smith, Diary #11*.

³⁷ The mention of "inferior" cooking skills frequently referred to "foreign" workers. As described by Dudden, pp. 131-136.

³⁸ See Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982, pp.71-72.

³⁹ Faye Dudden, *Serving Women* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 54.

⁴⁰ As relayed in Dudden, pp. 56-58.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 69-70.

⁴² Hasia R. Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1983), pp. 91-94.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 91.

⁴⁵ Dudden, pp. 55-60.

⁴⁶ *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, pp. 51-54.

CHAPTER 2

SALEM'S "PALACE OF CONSUMPTION"

To James Almy at least, Salem's well-known department store Almy, Bigelow & Washburn was the center of Boston's North Shore shopping life. A bicycle map published by the store in 1897 illustrates Salem's Almy store as the central destination for shoppers in Marblehead, Swampscott, Peabody, Lynn, Lynnfield, Middleton, Danvers, and Beverly. The map, produced in pleasing pastel colors and given out as part of a store promotion, lists Almy's extensive departments and services, as well as detailed trolley routes in and out of Salem. With Almy's map in hand, prospective shoppers easily biked or rode to Salem's most distinguished department store; it was Almy's new store that provided much of the merchandise that Salemites purchased to fill their homes and leisure time. Almy quickly embraced emerging advertising strategy as well as technology to make his store a uniquely modern space that became a go to destination for the city and all neighboring communities.

James Almy was born in Adams, Massachusetts on July 24, 1833. The son of Quakers, Almy is said to have valued hard work and to have been ambitious "not only for himself but for his associates and his city."¹ Almy left Adams for Salem at the age of twenty-one and found work with a local drygoods shopkeeper, W.W. Palmer. He spent

four years learning the business before opening his own shop in 1858. In September of that year Almy opened a small dry goods store at 156 Essex Street [see map 1]. The store measuring 17x47 feet, offered fabric, thread, and sundries to Salem residents.² His business quickly grew and in 1861 he expanded his store and moved it to a new location at 186 Essex Street. This new site, measuring 20x75 feet, offered a greater variety of goods, although the Civil War clearly impacted his business. A store publication dated and distributed in 1908 cited the troubles Almy faced while operating his expanded store during the war. “Altho’ [sic] no invading army marched through the old Puritan city storekeepers felt the stress of the war keenly, for most housewives could not afford many new gowns, when a simple calico cost at least five dollars.”³ Almy made it through the war, however, and appears to have had some financial success. In 1867 he and two associates purchased the Derby Farm in Salem. The Derby Farm, consisting of 100 acres and located in South Salem, belonged to the heirs of Salem’s shipping king, Elias Haskett Derby.

Almy and his two associates divided the land into streets and house lots and offered the land for sale. Almy believed the sale of this land benefited Salem by offering new space to enlarge the city and drew new residents, while simultaneously adding needed revenue to the town’s weakened treasury.⁴ The sale of house lots on Derby’s Farm had a marked impact on the city in terms of class; many streets created by the sale of this property became home to Salem’s new middle class community, while Lafayette Street itself, still the primary roadway into Marblehead and Swampscott, became home to Salem’s new moneyed elite, including James Almy himself.

Just after the conclusion of the Civil War, Almy partnered with his brother-in-law, Walter K. Bigelow, to expand his store. The pair added several departments and renamed itself James S. Almy & Co., becoming the “largest business house in Salem.”⁵ In 1869 businessman William G. Webber consolidated his holdings into Almy’s and the store was re-branded Almy, Bigelow, & Webber. Upon Webber’s retirement several years later, his investments were withdrawn and Messrs Calvin R. Washburn and E. Augustus Washburn became partners with Almy and Bigelow. This store, now known as Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn (AB&W), became Salem’s premiere shopping attraction by 1890.

The spirit of enterprise and market that modernized Salem during the American Revolution was alive and well again during the late nineteenth century. Salem’s downtown streets, including Lafayette Street, Derby Street, Washington Street, and Essex Street, became the shopping destination for citizens north of Boston. Essex Street alone housed dozens of shops offering a variety of goods. Ready-made clothing, undergarments, shoes, coats, and rainwear were purchased at Frank Cousins, CEO E. Pearsons, the Nugent Bros., Briggs and Wilkins, F. H. Moreland, and the Naumkeag Clothing Company, among many others. Women’s fancy goods could be acquired at E.A. & R.F. Daly or S.H.B. Goodhue’s. W.C. Packard sold furniture, carpeting, and kitchen appliances, while W.M.J. Lefavour offered pianos. At least four apothecaries or “druggists,” all of whom looked to alleviate a variety of Victorian maladies, called Essex Street home.⁶ Amid these many storefront stood Almy, Bigelow, and Washburn.

Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn offered three floors of merchandise and office space. Items for sale included fine furniture and decorative objects, kitchen goods and

housekeeping linens, ready-wear clothing and shoes, carpeting (including Oriental rugs), books, millinery, leisure items, and a variety of “real Japanese goods” (selected personally by Bunkio Matsuki).⁷ Almy’s also provided a variety of services, including tailoring, rug cleaning, embroidery and engraving. Merchandise and services offered by Almy, Bigelow, and Washburn were similar to those being offered in many other department stores throughout America during this time.

Prior to the emergence of department stores in the 1880s, customers ordered needed items through popular mail order catalogs or visited local shopkeepers. Shop owners in both rural and urban communities limited their inventory somewhat and abided by popular retailing wisdom of the day, which stressed specialization of marketed goods.⁸ During this time prices in these stores remained unfixed, allowing customers to negotiate payment with shopkeepers to acquire needed items inexpensively. Retailers purchased merchandise from wholesalers on credit and in turn sold their inventory to customers on credit.⁹

With the rise of department stores, however, business was conducted differently. Susan Strasser has identified a number of characteristics for department store pricing. First, customers purchased items from stores at set prices, which ensured that customers received fair prices for purchased goods. Secondly, set prices allowed shopkeepers to calculate profits for the store, ensuring that their store’s expenditures were covered. Lastly, retailing success derived from departmentalization, meaning the merchandise itself determined profitability. Store owners soon invented accounting systems, which allowed them to audit goods and departments within their store and determine the success

of each object.¹⁰ Unpopular items or departments were discontinued to save the store money and floor space.

Considering gender within the context of the Victorian department store is multi-tiered; female customers of varying classes, and the women who served them, all play an important role in its composition. Within the walls of a city's department store women found expressions of freedom (though not independence) where it had previously been denied. Department stores became a woman's world, despite their male leadership and ownership. Merchandise was acquired, and advertising developed, with the female consumer in mind. Women were believed to be a department store's primary purchasers when not limited by their own or their husband's purse strings.¹¹

During the 1890s shopping became an important pastime for middle class women. For the wives of middle class professionals whose time was freed somewhat by new technology in the home, the wide availability of readymade goods, and the employment of domestic servants, shopping influenced how they dressed and decorated their homes. According to historian Candace Volz, homey and handsome decorative flourishes in the home reflected positively on them as wives and homemakers and solidified their social standing.¹² Visiting stores also killed time and relieved boredom.¹³

For women of lower middle class standing department stores offered an important escape. In these stores these women could take a break and be attended to and served while replacing household items and clothing, or purchasing small trinkets or indulging in some luxurious goods like perfume or scented soaps. Bancroft asserts that shopping was considered by them to be a "cheap entertainment." For many middle class

women shopping was their premiere leisure activity. In these stores they met and socialized with other women and were even encouraged to relax and loiter by store owners.¹⁴

The contribution of laboring class women during the 1880s and 1890s is less easily defined. Single women in cities found work as domestics and factory workers, office clerks, and shop girls. They worked long hours for low wages. Still, for those who lacked family obligations, their jobs allowed them enough disposable income to make them happy consumers. Sales clerks were instructed by their supervisors to be polite and attentive to rich and poor alike as department store owners happily opened their doors to any person with disposable income without outward prejudice.¹⁵

Working women, usually young women without families or homes, shied away from purchasing home decorations and furnishings and instead acquired clothing, hats and gloves, perfume, and cosmetics; items previously considered outside their social and economic boundaries.¹⁶ Domestic servants, for example, were often called out by their employers for dressing too extravagantly and were chastised for dressing in clothing suitable for “persons with wealth or social standing.”¹⁷ Likewise, store clerks became fodder for customers who felt they also overdressed and “[bore on their] person marks of opulence which apparently do not accord to [their] position.”¹⁸ Whether they were employees or patrons, department stores allowed women to flirt with class mobility through the acquisition of goods.¹⁹

At the turn of the century, department stores located in large and small cities alike show commonalities beyond material goods and their appeal to women. Firstly,

department stores were free and shoppers were allowed entry without the pressure to purchase. Secondly, stores participated in advertising blitzes by bombarding area newspapers with announcements of giveaways and special promotions. Stores also sent out personal invitations to store events to regular customers. Thirdly, storeowners understood the desires of their customers and increased their range of products as customers' interest grew. Fourthly, stores used a variety of early marketing techniques to make their store appealing to shoppers by hiring display managers to create store displays filled with color and lavish fabrics. Stores' use of natural and artificial light, mirrors, and glass allowed ideal display conditions in which to showcase new acquisitions. Next, stores used modern technology to expand their sales. Elevators were being installed in most major department stores by the 1880s, by making additional floors of merchandise easily accessible to consumers. Telephones were also installed in department stores to make it possible for clerks to take telephone orders and make home deliveries to shoppers unable or unwilling to leave their homes. Electricity allowed for brighter shopping conditions and extended store hours in some instances, and central cashier stations with cash registers allowed for quicker cash outs, keeping business moving. Lastly, department stores sought to make the stores themselves tourist destinations by organizing lectures, art exhibitions, concerts, plays, and other extravaganzas to lure customers into the store.²⁰

Large department stores like Marshall Fields in Chicago, William Filenes's Sons in Boston, and Macy's in New York City were established in their cities by the mid 1880s and by the following decade their business sense was earning them large profits.

Their stores became go-to destinations for locals and tourists alike who were impressed with the opulence and exoticism of the stores' inner and exterior spaces. Marshall Field, for example, built two stores in Chicago in six years. The first store, built in 1887 and well regarded for its beauty, was painted "brilliant white" and benefited from the flood of sunshine that poured into the store through large glass windows and a glass well in the center of the store's ceiling.²¹ His second store, built in 1893 in honor of the Columbian Exposition, was said to have been "reminiscent not only of the palaces of Italy but also of monumental public buildings of Paris...and New York."²² Other department stores impacted visitors similarly; Macy's famous display windows first wowed New York audiences in 1884.

Inside the stores display managers created foreign and dreamlike spaces. Window spaces were decorated with rainbows of color where fabric was creatively twisted into whimsical shapes such as flowers, castles, or boats.²³ Stores recreated Japanese tearooms, Turkish Bazaars, or popular scenes from ballets and operas. In 1896 New York's Siegel-Cooper kept an elephant in its animal department until it was purchased by a New York zoological garden. An unnamed Chicago department store featured a "reproduction gold mine in active operation" in its store space.²⁴ Stores embraced marketing concepts to charm shoppers into their doors and appeal to their senses of adventure or refinement.

As consumer culture in America rose, buoyed in part by the success of large department stores throughout the nation's cities, advertising became a key driving force for both manufacturers and store owners. Many manufacturers sold their items to

consumers by stressing the importance of technology and modernity. Companies looked to convert customers to the modern ways of mass production and ready-made goods, stressing their superiority to hand made items. Advertisers began hiring artists, copywriters, and researchers who conducted market research and targeted specific customers.²⁵ Manufacturers became experts at pitching their numerous products directly to the populace. Manufacturers sought added support by partnering with store owners and promoting special offers in individual stores. Now customers received literature through the mail or via their daily newspaper from their favorite local store, which was now recommending one brand to them over another. Advertisers nationwide targeted women through their advertising as consumption was seen in terms of gender.²⁶ Salem's Almy store participated in many of the same advertising techniques, which not only bolstered their own sales but made them the most popular store within the city where customers were assured they would find the best selection of items.

Almy's offered many of the same items and services department stores in Boston, New York, and Chicago brought to their customers. The store itself boasted thirty-six departments, a large restaurant and waiting room, an information bureau, and free coat and parcel checks. It also had a retiring room, or lounge, for weary shoppers, and toilets for both male and female customers. Almy's was the first store in Essex County to have a passenger elevator and it advertised the use of a ventilation system in the store for the purpose of "renewing the air."²⁷ Fred Smith and the Salem Electric Company (in which Almy was an investor) electrified the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store in September of 1893, making it the first store in Salem to have electricity.

It is unclear how the interior space of the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store looked. It can be safely assumed that the store lacked the same grandeur seen at Macy's or Marshall Fields, but certainly Almy's had tasteful designs to enhance their merchandise. The fact that Almy, Bigelow & Washburn came to rival some Boston stores (due to Matsuki's Bazaar) may indicate a show of luxury, but there is no way to confirm how store managers organized and decorated the space between the years 1890-1914.

Advertising was a key to the success of the Almy store. An advertising flyer sent to prospective customers in 1909 did not aim to hide marketing agendas. The post card depicts two gentlemen walking with two women. The quartet is engaged in the following conversation: "Good merchandising consists not only in making the sale, but in pleasing the customer so well that he'll come back again. We've mastered that science—may we show you how we do it? Our stock, our process, our service all help tell the tale of leadership." The opposite side of the card reads: "A 'High Art' Overcoat is always stylish-looking and so is the man who wears it! Modeled on living figures and fashioned by hand." An invitation for a fitting follows.²⁸ Earlier advertising was less blunt but sought similar gains.

Almy's published a variety of advertising booklets and promotional pieces that offered information about their store's goods and services and also sought to entertain or amuse. Advertisements looking to assist women in choosing the correct corset for their body type and activity level have survived.²⁹ Almy's also promised to ease the burden of domestic chores for housewives. Almy's offered professional carpet cleaning to patrons

and sold a variety of new kitchen gadgetry meant to lighten cooking chores. The Keystone Beater promised to “emancipate women” and included an extensive recipe book for drinks, side dishes, and desserts.³⁰

The store also published illustrated storybooks and gave them to children as part of an advertising campaign for “Mellin’s Food for Infants and Invalids” and children’s tooth cleaning powder. Annual catalogs published clothing and art objects for sale at the store or available for order.

A Christmas Catalog published by the store in 1892 divided the store’s stock into categories for easier gift giving. Categories included gifts for babies, little girls, little boys, young ladies, young men, wives or mothers, husbands or fathers, grandmothers, or grandfathers. The booklet guaranteed Almy’s would have the perfect gift for any family member to ensure an enjoyable Christmas season.³¹

Additional publications included tourist maps and itineraries, including the bicycle map mentioned at the start of this chapter and another travel brochure directed to reveal historic Salem to out-of-towners. This travel brochure titled “All about Historic Salem” has on its cover an illustration of the Pickman House, Salem’s oldest surviving building built in 1664, and reminds holders that the brochure is “compliments of AB&W incorporated.” Additional text explains that AB&W is a “leading department store of Essex County, pleasantly situated in Salem, Massachusetts. A Delightful carriage drive or automobile trip from all points on the North Shore with Thirty-Six departments.” The inside of the flyer lists places to visit, which were (and still are) considered “Places of Historical Interest.” Sites include Nathaniel Hawthorne’s former residences, the Ward

House, City Hall, Peabody Museum, and The Witch House, the home of the Salem Witch Trials magistrate Jonathan Corwin. The back page included a small map of downtown Salem with the Almy store x-ed on it. Listing of the store's merchandise followed, including house furnishing, carpets, draperies, shoes, ready-to-wear garments, dry goods, books, stationery and engraving. Also, the sale of "a complete assortment of suitable souvenirs; souvenir china, post cards, etc, cameras and camera supplies" indicates Salem's formative years as a local tourist spot.³²

Almy sought the patronage of all the North Shore and his advertising demonstrates an attention to class and gender similar to those used in other department stores during this time. Women invited to Almy's new fitting rooms in 1892 were welcomed into new fitting rooms where they could try on "cloaking goods" in the same privacy assured to them in their own homes.³³ The presence of lounges, toilets, and restaurants indicate that guests, primarily ladies, shopped and lingered there. An undated portrait of Almy's sales staff shows nearly forty workers; three quarters of them young women.

Almy's offered a variety of goods at prices to satisfy the upper, middle, and laboring classes and his store was a popular choice for those living on the North Shore. Department stores in the late nineteenth century are often thought to be culturally unique for the time because nowhere else could you find, for example, a distinguished gentlewoman shopping shoulder to shoulder with a working girl, and Almy's exemplifies this model. The store offered dry fur storage to Salem's elite but simultaneously sought customers of more modest means. Almy's advertising literature proves that the store

sought the patronage of Salem's immigrant laborers; they advertised directly to Salem's immigrant laborers, as is evidenced by surviving promotional literature in both French and Polish, the mother tongues of Salem's largest immigrant communities, evidence of Almy's desire to market across class lines.³⁴

Almy's desire to reach across social and class barriers to sell to Salem's wealthy, middle, and laboring classes places the store at the center of societal change within the city. On any given day men and women of all three classes passed through the store's glass doors and immaculate displays to purchase both necessary and frivolous items. Almy's offered items to fit the budgets of all members of Salem society. Few places but Almy's permitted the mingling of classes within Salem. Not only were the patrons who represented all of Salem's classes shopping shoulder-to-shoulder, wealthy and middle class and laboring class clerks were serving middle class patrons.

Whereas advertising brought all classes to Almy's store, his workforce was responsible for making each customer feel welcomed and valued, and for closing each sale. Almy's, like most department stores of the day, provided an avenue of regular contact among Salem's classes that had not existed within Salem since before the American Revolution when the wealthy and laboring classes lived together on the city's waterfront.

Although female employees and customers largely dominated stores, the store still had some identifiable masculine spaces. Men were invited for suit and jacket fittings and to browse the store's book selections.

Almy's "Balcony Restaurant," considered shared space during this time, looked to expand the restaurant's business by attracting customers already working in the downtown area. AB&W offered this gentle cue to area businessmen

A Daily Reminder for Men

On Pleasant Days when the Family's away Lunch at the AB&W Restaurant

On Stormy Days when you can't go home Lunch at the AB&W Restaurant³⁵

Restaurant goers were treated to home cooked meals and sweet treats such as cakes and "college ices." James Almy sought to make a space where all of Salem could come and enjoy his store

Perhaps Almy's largest advertising campaign was the opening of Bunkio Matsuki's Japanese Bazaar in 1891. The Japanese Bazaar took years to plan and found its opening day a much-anticipated event in the city. Japanese novelty stores were very popular in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century and by the 1890s Japanese exports were considered the height of fashion from Boston to Texas.³⁶ The previous year James Almy requested that Matsuki travel to Japan to make a number of purchases on behalf of his store. Matsuki agreed and traveled to Japan to acquire the desired materials.

While Matsuki was in Japan, Almy cleared his existing stock of Japanese wares. He offered his shoppers vast sales to rid his store of merchandise now thought inauthentic. Inferior items, Almy contended, were items his competitors carried, which both Almy and Matsuki said were made in Chinese factories.³⁷ In addition, Almy began an intense advertisement campaign announcing the imminent opening of a Japanese Department in his store. According to promotions, the new department carried only

“genuine Japanese” items; materials carefully selected by Matsuki himself. Almy carefully played up Matsuki’s ancestry as part of his marketing.³⁸ “Mr. Matsuki is here himself in charge and is glad to show and discourse upon the beautiful things from his own country. The national pride is strong in him and there is no sturdier enemy of the Chinese-imitated Japanese wares which flood the market.”³⁹ Through his advertising, Almy made it clear to buyers that choosing items at his store guaranteed buyers that their purchases were authentically Japanese rather than substandard imitations. Almy stressed to his customers that Matsuki’s Japanese connections ensured him, and all of Salem, access to Japan’s best artists.

Salem’s sumptuous history as a thriving seaport during the American Revolution found the city wealthy with Chinese and Indian textiles. Salem residents had a long history of consuming “oriental goods,” including tea, textiles, porcelain, and ceramics. Such items were highly sought after in Salem and assured buyers a piece of a far away world while serving them, as Mari Yoshihara has stated, “an imagined vision of the Far East.”⁴⁰ Many Americans, Salemites chief among them, sought Chinese luxury items such as tea, porcelain, and fabrics to decorate their homes. Asian wares endlessly fascinated American buyers throughout the nineteenth century, and were, according to historian Hina Hirayama, “the very medium through which many people in Salem found their perception of [a] distant and enigmatic land.”⁴¹

The Japanese government’s decision to prevent foreign travel and trade until 1854 resulted in only a small trickle of exported goods. When the American government effectively forced open Japan’s borders with Commodore Perry’s ultimatum in 1853, and

American missionaries and educators flooded inside, Japanese goods became much sought after. The American interest in Japan in the latter half of the nineteenth century is exemplified in Salem's ravenous consumption of goods sold in Bunkio Matsuki's Japanese Bazaar.

The media frenzy surrounding the opening of Matsuki's "little Japanese corner" is documented in the months leading up to its August grand opening. Regular articles in the *Salem Evening News* recorded the progress. On August 1st, the opening day of the Japanese Bazaar, patrons flooded the Almy store and sales soared so high in the first week that orders for additional merchandise were placed in Japan almost immediately to ensure an adequate supply for ravenous buyers.⁴² The department became so popular that it was enlarged and reopened. On November 23,rd only three months after its initial opening, guests were invited to a "greatly enlarged 'Japanese corner' in the Almy store."⁴³

In addition to items listed for sale at Matsuki's Bazaar, these stood the promise of Matsuki himself. Matsuki, the host of the event, was scheduled to appear at the Grand Opening "in his native Japanese costume, and...assisted by two Japanese misses, Otame and Hiro Takayanagi," all of whom served to offer the evening's entertainment.⁴⁴ Matsuki's goods, quickly snapped up by Salem's public, ranged from "inexpensive and pretty novelties" to the "finest, richest, and costliest articles that come from the home and seat of Oriental art."⁴⁵

To ensure that his store had new and unique items, Almy sent Matsuki to Japan annually. With each trip Matsuki's journeys to Japan fueled greater media coverage. The

popularity of Matsuki's department bolstered Almy's commercial standing within the city of Salem. By 1895 Almy's was the go-to department store on the North Shore and its collection was so great that it soon competed with Boston merchants—even some Bostonians traveled to Salem to shop Matsuki's hand-chosen wares.⁴⁶

Matsuki's department remained a popular attraction at Almy's from 1891 to 1896. It is not clear what exactly prompted the closing of Matsuki's successful department. It appears that the two men had a falling out over business plans and changed their partnership as a result.⁴⁷ Almy indeed closed Matsuki's department in his Salem store, yet retained some entrepreneurial connection with him through Matsuki's new Boston store. In 1899, however, Almy and Matsuki severed all business ties with one another entirely.

There is no recorded evidence that James Almy began feeling unwell as early as 1895. Reports note that Almy, the once well respected, warm, and jovial businessman, had become “exceedingly irritable” and “out of his mind.”⁴⁸ Those closest to him, including his family and workforce, noted some disturbing changes in his demeanor. Perhaps modern doctors would have diagnosed him with dementia or Alzheimer's, but whatever his condition, Almy was faltering even as the department store he created continued to grow. There is no concrete evidence to verify that Matsuki and Almy's rumored falling out aside from local legend and Almy's recorded diminished mental state.⁴⁹ Those closest to Almy documented their own struggles to work and interact with him and some declared him “mentally unbalanced.”⁵⁰

James Almy died in Salem on April 14, 1899 only three years after completing the building of his grand new home on Lafayette Street; he had hanged himself in his home. An unnamed domestic found his body and sought help from Almy's neighbor, according to the *Salem Evening News*. His business booming, home life reportedly positive, his community status undeniably important, his second wife and three children survived him.

Little is known about Almy, aside from snippets published in advertising literature after his death, and even less is known about his wife. There are no personal accounts to confirm how Almy lived his daily life; his legacy is tied almost exclusively to the memory of the Almy's store, which he founded, and his purchase of the land once known as the Derby Farm. It is clear from surviving records that James Almy was a man deeply committed to his community. Almy lead the formation of the Salem Board of Trade, sat on the Salem School Board in 1856, and again from 1896-1898. He served on the town's Common Council and Legislature and on the city's planning committee. He also served as director of the Salem Lighting Company alongside Fred Smith. With Smith, Almy shared a passion to modernize Salem residences and public spaces and bring Salem into a truly modernized world.

In many ways Salem's commercial rebirth is linked to the success of the Almy store. Almy modernized shop keeping in Salem by adopting new advertising and marketing strategies, as well as new technology. With a large number of shops to chose from in the city center, Almy's became the number one destination for most North Shore shoppers. Almy's advertised and merchandised to the city's upper, middle, and laboring

classes and he received the patronage of all three classes. Following the lead of the country's large department stores in Chicago, New York City, and Boston, he spent large amounts of money modernizing the store's physical space by adding electricity, telephones, an air circulation system, and an elevator.

Most importantly, he correctly judged national purchasing trends and periodically made changes to his store, and its inventory, thereby dictating the purchasing desires of his customers and maybe even the city itself. In Salem, the Smith family best exemplifies the consumer zeal prevalent among the nation's rising middle class during the 1890s.

¹ Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899. *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Fifty Years, 1858-1908*. Peabody Essex Museum, Phillips Library.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Store names, addresses, and items for sale were found in advertisements posted in the *Salem Evening News* various dates from 1890-1899.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Susan Porter Benson. *Counter Culture: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), p. 12.

⁹ Benson, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰ Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), pp. 204-206.

¹¹ Although budgetary limits did not always dissuade some women from their impulse to consume, as Elaine Abelson notes in her study on Victorian shoplifting, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

¹² Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth, ed, *American Home Life, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pp. 51-54.

¹³ Ibid, p. 22.

¹⁴ Loitering was encouraged by large department stores whose proprietors built restrooms, lounges, and restaurants to offer shoppers breaks but keep them from exiting

the store. Shopkeepers believed that once customers were rested or fed, they were likely to spend additional money on goods within the store. See Benson, p. 20.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 21-22.

¹⁶ Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumption: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (March, 1997) pp. 113-114.

¹⁷ As described by Catherine Beecher in Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), p. 120.

¹⁸ As quoted in Benson, p. 130.

¹⁹ Stearns, p. 106.

²⁰ Benson, p. 19 for list of technologies adopted by department stores during this time to modernize their stores; Almy will show us examples of this later in this chapter. See William R. Leach, "Transformation in a Culture of Consumption: Women and Department Stores, 1895-1925," *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 71, No. 2 (Sept., 1994), p. 325 to review popular events staged at department stores to draw in consumers. See also Robert D. Tamilia, "World's Fairs and the Department Store 1800s to 1930s," (available online at <http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/charm/dept.store.pdf>, accessed on August 16, 2009), p. 234, writes of department stores as tourist destinations in connection to World's Fairs.

²¹ As described in Benson, p. 19.

²² Ann Lorenz Van Zanten as quoted in Robert D. Tamilia, "World's Fairs and the Department Store 1800 to 1930s" (<http://faculty.quinnipiac.edu/charm/dept.store.pdf>), p. 237 [accessed August 16, 2009].

²³ As described in Abelson, p. 45.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 48.

²⁵ *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, pp. 93, 110.

²⁶ Ellen Gruber Graver, *The Adman in the Parlor* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 174.

²⁷ *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Fifty Years, 1858-1908*

²⁸ *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1900-date.*

²⁹ Activity level of the corset wearer began to be considered during the 1880s as women became more involved in physical activity and joined local gymnasiums. Abelson, p. 26, has identified some advertisements for "athletic corsets" which made activities, including bicycle riding easier.

³⁰ *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899.*

³¹ Advertising literature can be found in *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899.*

³² Ibid

³³ "Cloaking Goods," *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899.*

³⁴ *Almy, Bigelow, & Washburn Advertising Matter, 1891-1899.*

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Cynthia A Brandimarte writes about the popularity of Japanese Novelty Stores in the United States during the late nineteenth century with special emphasis on the stores'

popularity in Texas. See "Japanese Novelty Stores," *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 1991), pp. 1-25.

³⁷ Invitation to the "Formal Opening of Our Japanese Bazaar, Saturday August 1, 1891," *Almy, Bigelow, and Washburn Advertising Materials 1891-1899*, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ "Invitation to the Formal Opening of Our Japanese Bazaar, Saturday August 1, 1891."

⁴⁰ Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 8.

⁴¹ "A Pleasing Novelty:" *Bunkio Matsuki and The Japan Craze in Victorian Salem* (Peabody & Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts, 1993), p. 88.

⁴² See *Salem Evening News*, August 2, 1891 and "A Pleasing Novelty," p. 15.

⁴³ "Japanese Opening, Monday, November 23," *Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Advertising Materials 1891-1899*.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 20.

⁴⁷ "A Pleasing Novelty," pp. 28-33.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid

⁵⁰ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3

“THE ELECTRIC SERVANT”

The electrification of the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store in 1893 indicates the modernity, which was welcomed into the city of Salem in the 1890s, swiftly changing the lives of its occupants. Electrified trolley cars carried Salemites from the city's far points into the city center, an area during this time enjoying renewed commercial success. Although wealthier patrons retained their horse-drawn carriages, Salem's middle and laboring classes used the trolley service to reach Salem's shopping center. Once there, shoppers browsed for and later purchased a variety of items that, either intentionally or not, defined their class standing or helped them achieve some class mobility. One family in particular, the Smith family, carved out a comfortable middle class lifestyle in Salem as the city modernized with electrical power.

On May 1, 1893, President Grover Cleveland flicked an electronic switch and signaled the opening of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago.¹ Covering six hundred acres, the fair featured nearly two hundred buildings and thousands of exhibits, ranging from art and home decorative objects to new household technologies, conveniences such as ready-made foods, and leisure items.² Displays showcased the wares of hundreds of private organizations, including exhibits that appealed to women and African

Americans.³ All American states, as well as a number of the nation's territories, held exhibits, in addition to nearly three-dozen foreign nations.⁴ One guidebook listed more than five thousand items on display, many of which showcased new technologies and the might of electrical machinery.

Electricity played a large role in the Columbian Exposition. Electricians were hired to build and operate the many electrical installations. The Paris Exposition, which took place four years prior in 1889, was the first successful global event to effectively use electricity. Chicago's fair used ten times more electricity, however, employing 90,000 Sawyer-Mann incandescent lamps using alternating current, installed by Westinghouse for \$5.25 each, and 5,000 arc lights installed by General Electric. To put these figures in perspective, historian David Nye has asked us to consider that in 1890 there were only 68,000 arc lights and 900,000 incandescent lamps in the entire United States.⁵ Columbian Exposition visitors could ride on or see electrified sites that included three cranes, elevators, water fountains, an on-site railroad/streetcar system, and moving sidewalks.

Among the Exposition's central attractions was the Electrical Building, which, amid other attractions, featured a complete model house running entirely on electricity. Historian Susan Strasser described the Electrical Building "complete with electric stoves and hot plates ('dishes are kept hot on the table by dainty, polished electric warming furnaces connected by wires under the table'), washing and ironing machines, fans, dishwashers, and carpet sweepers."⁶

The estimated crowd of twenty-seven million who entered the fair grounds and passed through the doors of the Electric Building encountered a somewhat bewildering sight. At this time only the nation's wealthiest citizens had access to and used electrical devices in their own homes.⁷ To the middle and laboring classes who attended the fair, the items on display surely appeared somewhat surreal. A proposed transition to electrical lighting from gas may have found an appeal to most visitors but other items would have been a harder sell; the use of electricity to cook food, for example, raised eyebrows among cooks wary of preparing their meals without fire.⁸ The transition from fireplaces to coal fired cookstoves had been hard for some, and the transition to gas fired cookstoves harder still for others.⁹ The use of electricity to cook food was greeted with even greater suspicion and had few excited; cooks had been taught to manipulate their cooking apparatus and flames to properly cook their meals. The Electric Building at the Columbian Exposition demonstrated that, while modernity had its limits, seeds of conversion had been planted.

Throughout the 1870s, Thomas Edison worked to create a total electricity generating system for "controlling, measuring, distributing, and utilizing power."¹⁰ Edison sought to refine the incandescent lighting system so that it could become both affordable and accessible to all persons. Cost became key to challenging the gas industry, which dominated the lighting industry during that time.¹¹ Edison brought his new inventions to the Columbian Exposition in 1893 and sought to transform households with his new discoveries. Although wealthier Americans used electricity prior to its introduction at the fair, more common fairgoers were first introduced to the technology

through fair demonstrations. Women's magazines advertised new kitchen appliances to wealthy and middle class readers but the fair showed these women how easily these new items could be used and obtained.¹² America's budding consumer culture was ravenous for home goods that promised ease of living and the possibility of increased leisure time, and advertising fueled demand for new merchandise.¹³ Their homes would be more efficiently lit, and cleaner too.

The nineteenth century saw a rapidity of lighting changes. Americans began the century by fireside and candlelight, and forty years later Kerosene became a popular and more affordable lighting choice. By the 1860's gas was a common lighting source found in stores, factories, hospitals, and on city streets. After the Civil War, gas lit many wealthy and middle class homes.¹⁴ Electricity began lighting some homes and businesses during the 1880's but the technology and the service was inconsistent throughout the decade. Consumers feared fire and electrocution but remained interested in the appeal of the soot-free home promised by a perfected electrical system meant to replace gas.

Electricity began entering homes in the 1890s. Wealthy homeowners were among the first to benefit from electricity. Wealthy Americans easily afforded the cost of converting or replacing gas appliance to electrical ones and could afford expensive electric bills. Once electricity became more widely available (and less expensive), middle class families began making the switch from gas to electric, too. These conversions led both wealthy and middle class families to begin acquiring electrical devices such as irons [1882], electric mixers [1885], sewing machines [1889],

refrigerators [1890], vacuum cleaners [1901], and washing machines [the rotary machines of 1858 replaced by electric washers in 1908].

As new items entered American households they changed the lives of their occupants. Consumption fueled consumption, and a desire for leisure time, among all classes, became a hallmark of the generation. Families purchased a variety of items seen in stores in hopes that these objects would lessen the burden of their daily chores and allow them ample leisure. By 1890, premade foods, ready-made clothing, as well as cleaning products and appliances were easily accessible to families in their local department stores. Advertisers promised that their products would decrease the burden of household tasks to consumers without compromising growing standards of cleanliness.¹⁵

Advertisers promised relief for consumers in other areas, too. The “servant problem,” which was being argued in the pages of ladies’ magazines and newspapers beginning in the United States in the 1880s and in Salem during the 1890s, became an important advertising tool for some companies. Massachusetts based General Electric assured consumers that adopting electricity and acquiring new household appliances, or “electric servants,” would nullify their need for domestic servants.

General Electric produced technologies meant to “delight all housekeepers”¹⁶ and assured them their products would allow homemakers to more easily attend to their own homes. For the mistress who felt plagued by the hiring of fickle domestics, household products could allow her to complete her own chores with speed and efficiency.

A General Electric advertisement published in *McClure's* magazine reminded women that housework was hard work, and that electricity would make it lighter.

General Electric addressed the alleged “servant problem” directly, saying:

...there's a way to simplify both the work and the problem—a way surprisingly easy and inexpensive...Electric servants can be depended on—to do the muscle part of the washing, ironing, cleaning, and sewing. They will cool the house in summer and help heat the cold corners in winter. There are electrical servants to percolate your coffee, toast your bread and fry your eggs. There's a big, clean electrical servant that will do all your cooking—without matches, without soot, without coal, without argument—in a cool kitchen. Don't go to the Employment Bureau. Go to your Lighting Company or Leading Electric shop to solve your servant problem.¹⁷

In households that retained domestic servants, explained by family size or the prestige associated with having domestic servants, electric objects ensured that domestics ran clean and efficient households. For homes where domestics could be dispensed with, these objects projected a reduction in the amount of labor.¹⁸ Even though new technology made household tasks easier for mistresses, dispensing with servants transferred the work, even if easier, from the domestic to mistress, creating new work formerly outside the mistresses' domain. Even as middle class women acquired household appliance to “ease their labor,” most retained a domestic for service simply because the employment of household servants ensured prestige among their friends and neighbors.¹⁹

Advertisers appealed to households both with and without servants. They promised buyers that new technology would benefit those with servants or allow mistresses the freedom to dispense with them. Strasser argues that advertisements offered middle class mistresses potential relief from their dependence on domestics.²⁰ New technologies suggested to the mistress that she could easily take over her own

household duties.²¹ If an employer felt compelled to discharge a domestic for undesirable behavior or performance, or if a domestic quit her job on the spot with little warning, mistresses could effectively take over the management of their households without sacrificing the needs of their families or embarrassment in their household duties. The message became a simple one—technology brought relief from the tyranny of domestics; relief that would not be found for all until electricity pulsated through every American city and town.

Even before the Columbian Exposition, some communities began electrifying their city streets. Although many rural communities would not see their homes electrified until after both World Wars, some cities began using electricity as early as the 1880s to power small trolley car systems. Other larger cities, such as New York, Chicago, and Washington D.C., electrified businesses and hotels to experiment with a new and imperfect electrical system. Households remained largely untouched by electricity during this time, with the exception of select wealthy industrialists who experimented with it in their homes during the 1880s.²² By the 1890s smaller cities began adopting electricity as it fell in price and became preferable to gas.²³ Electricity became a useful tool to link citizens closer to one another and allow them easier access to the city's downtown areas where they made purchases and meet with neighbors.

The complex changes resulting from the introduction of electricity both within American cities and individual households affected the families of Salem as they did nationwide. For wealthy and middle class families alike, electric household technologies promised to lighten domestic chores. The city of Salem first began installing trolley cars

in 1889 and by 1892 the city greatly expanded these lines and transferred city street lighting from gas to electric. The city was the first on the North Shore to make these changes, organized and lead by the Salem Electric Lighting Company managed by Fred Smith.

Fred Smith was born in Salem in June of 1861. Smith's father, Sterry Smith, was a widowed laborer who worked in a Rhode Island quarry before moving to New Hampshire (presumably for work) where he met and married Sabrina Putnam, his second wife and Fred's mother. By the 1850's Sterry and Sabrina had come to Salem and started a family.²⁴ Once in Salem, Sterry worked as a machinist and raised his family at 14 Harbor Street in Salem [see map 5]—a tenement area in the city well known to house persons working in Salem's blubber, leather, and cotton factories.

Fred Smith attended and graduated from Salem High School in 1881 and then obtained a college education at the Bryant Stratton School in Boston, a trade school that offered a variety of training courses. While there, he was recruited to work at the Boston & Northern Telephone Company in Salem, where he worked for a decade before being offered the job as manager of the Salem Electric Lighting Company in 1891.

As manager of the Electric Lighting Company, Smith became responsible for the electrification of Salem and aided the neighboring communities of Peabody and Lynn in their transition from gas to electrical lighting systems.²⁵ Smith left behind nearly sixty handwritten journals with detailed accounts of the city's electrification and he revealed that in 1893, the same year as the Columbian Exposition, the Salem Electric Lighting Company installed 6,000 incandescent lights in the town's downtown shopping area.²⁶ It

also created enough coal-generated power to run seventeen streetcars daily and planned to increase this number to thirty by the end of that same year.²⁷ His writings reveal the city's zoning plans and the order in which areas of the city gained power. One of his first journals, dated 1891, shows the progression of the electrification of south Salem's city streets, the newest section where Salem's new moneyed and middle classes built their homes.²⁸

Smith recorded detailed notes for the lighting of the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store, Salem's first department store and first business to switch from gas to electric lighting in 1893.²⁹ An August entry includes seven pages of notes relating to the "relining," or laying of electrical wires behind the exposed wall, of "the men's and ladies' workroom" as well as the "Ladies Parlor and WC, Millinery department, elevator, dress making room," and other areas.³⁰ The list includes measurements and materials needed to complete the project. Although Smith did not complete the work himself, it appears that he did most of the planning, including taking measurements and ordering supplies.

The journals paint a portrait of a methodical and concerned supervisor and community member. His daily notes, while offering only small insights into his personal life, reveal a man passionate about his profession. Notes about repairs made to power and rails lines and service disruptions are mixed with clippings of editorials he wrote and published in the *Salem Evening News*, responding to public concerns about services and requests for changes to service.³¹ And although his notes about his professional service offer a needed timetable to demonstrate how technology entered Salem households, it is

his brief entries about smaller events occurring within his home that offer a more sound understanding of him and his family.

By the January of 1893, the Salem Electric Lighting Company began installing electricity into individual households in Salem. Advertisements published in the *Salem Evening News* lured potential customers to switch from gas to electricity by assuring them that their annual cost would not exceed the cost of gas. Electricity supplier also sought to win over customers by assuring them they would enjoy a clean and safe lighting experience.³²

As the manager of Salem's lighting company, it comes as little surprise that Smith's home was among Salem's first to have electricity. Although his home would not be entirely electrified until 1895, he was among the minority of middle class families that switched from gas to electricity in 1893. In 1895, with about 8, 400 households in Salem, only 516 households enjoyed the convenience of electricity.³³ Smith moved into a modest duplex at number 7 Piedmont Street [see map 6] on Salem's trendy south side in 1887, but work continued on the house, piece by piece, through 1896.

Smith's rise to prominence in Salem points out the fluidity of class and illustrates how individuals could cross class lines despite more modest upbringings. The son of a laborer, Smith became a well-known figure in Salem. Perhaps surprised by his own success, Smith cut out numerous newspaper articles about himself, his business, and his family from the *Salem Evening News* and pasted them in his journals.³⁴ By the 1890's, Smith enjoyed a comfortable middle class life with his wife, Sarah Elizabeth Gray, and their two sons, Sterry Putnam Smith and Fredrick Grafton Smith.

Smith's personal history illustrates the possibilities open to individuals of any class with initiative and ability. Although he was born to a machinist, and grew up in Salem's tenement housing on Harbor Street in Salem [see map 4], he rose to become the vice president of the Salem Lighting Company, and the president of the City's Chamber of Commerce. He attended and graduated from a modest trade college, the first in his family to do so, while his sons would surpass him by both attending Harvard University.³⁵

Smith married Sarah Elizabeth Gray in 1887. Sarah, known affectionately by her husband as Sally, was born in Salem in 1868 to an American man and his Canadian-born bride, Ann. Sarah, one of three children and the youngest of the trio, was the only daughter. Sarah's father, George Gray, was born in Maryland about 1833 and it is unclear why or when he headed to Massachusetts. George and Ann's first son, Warren, was born in Salem in 1859, indicating that George had already headed north, and begun a family before the start of the Civil War. Gray served as a private during the Civil War enlisting for service in September of 1864. He mustered out with the Massachusetts 25th Infantry Company on June 29, 1865—two months after General E. Lee surrendered his army to Ulysses S. Grant, and six days after a western cease fire secured the end of the war in the Oklahoma Territory. It is unclear where George Gray was sent or how long he was away. A second son, Thomas, was born to him and his wife sometime in 1865. Gray may or may not have been in Salem for the birth of this son. In 1868, Fred Smith's "dear Sally" was born.

Sally's family was among Salem's laboring class. George Gray worked as a mariner for a number of years, as the 1870 census and his enlistment papers both indicate.³⁶ His rank as a sailor is unknown but his geographical residence indicates that he would not have been highly paid and that he was likely a deck hand. By 1880 the United States census finds George employed as a "janitor;" his wife is listed as a "home keeper."³⁷

Sally's mother, Ann Gray, was born in Nova Scotia around 1825. She immigrated to the United States in 1848 with four family members, arriving in Boston on May 15 on the ship *Boston*.³⁸ Ann may have come to the United States in order to marry. She married a Salem laborer, James McLellen, who was ten years her senior and the widowed father of four children. Ann settled into her ready-made family and, shortly after her arrival, she and her husband had one child whom they named Charles. Sometime between 1852 and 1858, Ann herself became a widow and she married George Gray prior to 1859. In 1860, Ann is shown to be living in a small apartment in Salem's "Point" area [see map 3] with her new husband and their infant son Warren, as well as with her other son, Charles, and all of her first husband's brood.

There is no occupation listed for Ann in any of the census reports in which she appears, although it is highly likely that Ann worked. Her new husband, who during this time worked as a sailor, would have struggled to feed seven mouths and Ann typically would have supplemented her husband's earnings. Ann could have found work in any number of areas. Women in her position found employment in neighborhood factories, they worked as "living out girls" providing housekeeping, cooking, and childcare to

wealthier families, and they also provided childcare in their own homes for neighbors who worked, and they took in laundry to wash or mend.³⁹

Since in 1860 Ann had two small children of her own at home, it seems more likely that she would have taken in washing or mending or provided childcare to neighbors in need, and less likely that she would have left her home to work in a factory or as a domestic. The fact that she had three teenagers at home during this time made laundering or childcare a much more attractive choice because they would have been available to assist her in completing needed work. Any extra income earned by her would likely have been invaluable to her family during this time and once her husband left for war she would likely have become the family's primary breadwinner. Her husband's military stipend would hardly have covered the family's expenses.⁴⁰

Sally Smith was raised in a home without a servant and to parents that both worked; she was of decidedly laboring class origins. Her mother, in addition to completing work taken in for pay, would have been responsible for keeping her own home clean and preparing the family's meals. Sally, though enrolled in school, would have helped her mother with any number of these tasks when not attending classes.⁴¹

Sally's marriage to Fred Smith in 1887 was unlikely to have caused a stir between the two families. The Smiths and the Grays were both working class families and they lived not too far from one another. Sally and Fred may have known each other as children but, since there was a seven year age difference between the pair, they would not have attended school together. It is unclear how the couple met. Smith kept only two journals before the year 1891 and these journals, dated from 1880-1882 do not mention

Sally.⁴² Fred and Sally had two children, Grafton, born in February 1889, and Putnam, born in January 1891.

Fred Smith and his family would live a distinctly different life as adults than they did as children. Smith's education, as well as his obsessive interest in emerging technology,⁴³ allowed for economic opportunities that his parents could not have imagined. Although Fred and Sally were born into the laboring class, they would eventually join Salem's white-collar elite. As has been discussed in chapter one, the idea of the middle class in America during the late half of the nineteenth century remains a truly fluid one. Middle class is sometimes defined as native born, white collar, Protestant men and their families. These men worked salaried jobs that did not require them to perform any physical labor, and allowed them varying amounts of disposable income, which they readily spent on new household technology and leisure items.⁴⁴ How these families chose to decorate their homes becomes a measuring stick for determining middle class living.⁴⁵ By 1890, the class of a household was being defined not only by material wealth, but also by the neighborhoods in which families built their homes. How these families cared for their children, especially in regards to higher education, are also signs of class identity and social location.⁴⁶ Finally, understanding an individual's class at birth remains, as we will see later, just as significant for understanding her or his ascribed class and struggle for class mobility.

From 1888 until 1907, the Smith family lived in a modest duplex in south Salem at 7 Piedmont Street living in one of the two apartments, while renting out the second space. Sadly, the Smith home no longer stands, as the Salem fire of 1914 burned the

original structure to the ground. As a result, we do not know the architectural style of the Piedmont home. We do know that the land upon which this house was built once belonged to the Derby Farm before James Almy purchased it to break up and sell as house lots in 1867. Unlike Almy, however, who lived in the wealthier section of this new area, Smith and his family lived on one of the side streets, surrounded by other white-collar families. Since the city of Salem was, by this time, geographically divided by class, the location of the Smith home is one of our first indicators of their class; his family's copious consumption of material goods is the other.

The Smith family, like similar families during this time, was swept up by consumerism. Living in the North Shore's shopping hub allowed the family easy access to a variety of diverse stores. Within Smith's numerous journal entries, he records purchases of items such as bicycles, a Kodak camera, furniture, a piano, an icebox, and eventually an automobile. His journals reveal an interest in a number of other pre-made goods that were hitting the market at this time, including household cleaners, ready-made foods, and health tonics and elixirs.

On July 10, 1895, Fred had an accident. He reported, "sprained my ankle tonight while riding Obriss bicycle. Had the doctor twice."⁴⁷ To add insult to injury, his little tumble made it into the *Salem Evening News*, where he is said to have "caused significant injury" to the fence and shrubbery which broke his fall. It is of little surprise that Fred had and used a bicycle. By 1890 bicycle technology had changed so as to make the device a safer and more practical mode of transport. White-collar workers, as well as their wives, snapped up bicycles for both work transport and recreation. Some American

small machinery companies began making bicycles to compete with European importers. The Singer Company, the well-known sewing machine giant, was among those that converted their factories to make bicycles in the United States and the Columbian Exposition showcased the bicycle in the fair's Transportation Building. American bicycles cost about \$100, reportedly \$20 less than their imported competitors, but by the end of century bicycles were being purchased for about \$50.⁴⁸ The cost of bicycles made them worthy investment for the middle and upper classes but kept them out of reach for much of America's laboring class. For Salem's laborers, whose pay averaged less than fifteen dollars a week, a bicycle would have meant several months' pay.⁴⁹

The popularity of bicycle riding for leisure is documented in Smith's journals as he records the purchase of a bicycle for his wife and sons, and records spending time with his friends and neighbors, the Temples, whom Smith taught to ride and with whom he went on bicycling outings.⁵⁰ Smith's purchase of numerous bicycles for himself and his family demonstrates to modern readers two important points, firstly, that he had reached a point where his family enjoyed significant leisure time, and, secondly, that they had the means to fill this time enjoyably. It is unlikely that Smith would have needed a bicycle to get to and from work as his home was located a short block from Lafayette Street from where trolley tracks brought passengers directly to the downtown area. Smith's journal entries regarding his bicycles extend only to the description of leisurely afternoons and it seems likely that Smith purchased these items expressly for exercise and play.

In 1898 Smith "bought [a] Eastman Kodak camera...price \$8."⁵¹ Nearly ten years later Smith purchased a new camera for his wife's use. "Bought for Sally today [a]

pocket folding Kodak....for \$17.50. The Eastman Kodak camera came onto the market in 1888. The camera quickly became popular because of its portable size and ease of use. “You press the button and let us do the rest,” Kodak told its consumers. The camera came fully loaded with one hundred exposures. The camera operator had only to point and shoot and when all one hundred exposures were used the entire camera was returned to the Kodak Company for developing. Once the film was developed, the prints, along with a newly loaded camera, were returned to its owner. Smith purchased this camera two years before the Kodak Brownie became an inexpensive and popular item. The pocket-folding camera he bought for Sally ten years later was a prestigious camera model and not one that was easily afforded. The fact that Smith purchased this item for Sally indicates his place among the moneyed middle class.⁵² It may also indicate that Sally enjoyed photography as a hobby. Sally’s eldest brother, Warren, ten years her senior, worked as a photographer in Salem and could likely have introduced Sally to photography. Smith makes no mention of Sally taking photographs, however, and his recorded purchases are the only thing that put these cameras into Sally’s hands.

Smith purchased a variety of items to increase the comfort and style of his home. Smith’s Piedmont Street home underwent three separate renovations in 1895, 1900, and 1904. In 1895 he repaired the roof, electrified the bottom floor, and finished some cosmetic work, including painting, making notes in his diary about materials and labor costs. Smith hired local carpenters Thomas Pinwick and J. W. Peterson to do the renovations. It appears that Smith considered buying his roofing slate from three separate vendors, looking for the best price, including a consideration to buy leftover slate from

the roofing of the Salem Normal School. In the end he purchased his slate from Putnam and Pope in Beverly at \$3.25 a bundle, with the assurance that unused shingles could be returned for store credit. The first floor of the house was completely converted from gas fixtures to electrical ones in 1895. The following year he reports selling his old gas fixtures to a neighbor, Hattie Parsons, for a total of four dollars. In 1898 Smith acquired a new four-burner gas stove, a “#54 Perfect” made in Dayton Ohio. In 1900, when his friend and neighbor Mr. Temple moved to Dorchester with his family, Smith purchased from him a refrigerator for fifteen dollars.

That year began a series of other renovation projects at the Smith home. The changes to the Smith household included material upgrades and an expansion of living space. In May they removed their pine floors in the dining room and front parlor and laid down oak flooring. They also added double windows to the front of their home and added two porches to the house. The following May they completed work on the second floor, renovating their bedroom chamber and creating separate bedrooms for their two sons; these rooms were also electrified at this time.

The final renovations of the Smith home came in 1904. During this time the family combined their front and back parlors to make one large room and cosmetic changes were made to the family’s bathroom. Small changes were also made to the leased apartment adjacent to the home, including electrifying this unit before renting it to a new tenant, Henry H. Roberts, for thirty dollars a month.⁵³ Smith left behind a detailed expense register showing the cost of his final renovations. He decorated with the latest Victorian style, including oak floors, a handsome study for himself on the second floor

and renovations to the existing parlor to create a more inviting entertaining space.⁵⁴ The Smiths had their furniture recovered and their walls repapered and painted.

The upgrades made to the Smith home reflect the family's growing prestige within the city of Salem as well as their growing wealth. Smith's professional success reflects the rising use of electricity within Salem's homes and businesses. By 1900 Smith was the vice president of the Salem Electric Lighting Company and served on the city's chamber of commerce. Although Smith never made note of his salary, it surely increased as the popularity of electricity in Salem rose. Smith's acquisition of new technology and leisure items indicate to us that he and his family enjoyed comfortable means.

In many ways Smith and his family appeared to live a rather simple lifestyle. He tended to the upkeep of his own lawn and gardens and with the changes of the season he recorded picking from trees in his neighborhood fruit planted for the Derby family a century before. "Cherry tree in full bloom today," "picked the pears on the tree by our house today," or "picked my Plums today for the first time this season" is how he marked the seasons, along with his annual report of lighting or extinguishing the furnace and removing or installing his home's screens. Smith did this work on his own or assisted by his two sons or occasionally by a local hired hand, Mr. Treadwell

While her husband tended to their home's outdoor space, Sally Smith oversaw its interior. The management of her home was her career, and her career was surely influenced by the numerous women's magazines and home advice literature flooding the American market at this time.⁵⁵ The Victorian home represented a nurturing and

feminine domain. At the conclusion of the American Revolution, fathers, husbands, and brothers tucked women away into their homes seeking to shield the women in their lives from the perceived dangers of the outside world. As a result, the home became a truly gendered space with the wife and mother at the helm. A woman's femininity became linked to her success as a wife, mother, and housekeeper.⁵⁶

According to historians Candace Votz, Susan Strasser, and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, the lady of the house became responsible not only for household duties but also for the educational and social refinement of her entire family—with specific emphasis on her children's instruction.⁵⁷ By the 1890's, argues historian Katherine C. Grier, domesticity could be signaled by any number of things, from material acquisitions and their placement within the home to the cleanliness of the domesticated space.⁵⁸

Fred doesn't record how his wife spends her time day to day, but he does offer us occasional glimpses into some of her daily activities. We know that Sally occasionally hosted a Whist Club at her home. The Whist Club in Salem was one of many popular women's clubs in the city at the time. Women of the upper and middle classes belonged to a variety of clubs, including cooking clubs, book clubs, sewing circles, and card playing clubs such as these. Sally's first Whist Party, held at her home on December 7, 1893, was a great success, according to the *Salem Evening News*. The next day Fred Smith cut and carefully pasted the following article from the newspaper into his diary:

ACME WHIST CLUB

A Highly Enjoyable time at Salem Last Evening
The third weekly sitting of the Acme Whist Club was held
at the home of Mr. & Mrs. S Fred Smith, 9 [sic] Piedmont
Street, Salem, last evening. This club, from a social point

of view is all its name implies, as was fully demonstrated last evening. The pleasing manner and easy grace in which the club was entertained was a revelation even to the members of this club.

There were two prizes, one for the lady and one for the gentleman. The Lady's a neat set of table doilies made by the hostess and won by Mrs. Fred C. Spearing. The gentleman's a silver pencil holder won by Mr. G Harrie Smith. A fine collation was served and the sitting broke up in time for the party to take the 10:50 train for Lynn.

The following members were present: Mr. and Mrs. G. Harrie Smith, Mr. and Mrs. S.T. Patterson, Mr. and Mrs. Fred C. Spearing, Mr. and Mrs. George N. Nichols of Lynn, Mr. and Mrs. Rogers and Mr. and Mrs. Dearlorn of Swampscott, Miss Maime Parsons of Salem, and Mr. E. R. Richardson of Malden. The next sitting will take place at the residence of Mrs. George N. Nichols, 58 Beacon Hill Avenue, Wednesday evening, Dec. 13.⁵⁹

This description of Sally's party reveals a number of things about her domestic sphere. Sally was a successful hostess and the importance of this should not be overlooked. The *Salem Evening News*' rapturous documentation of the event where members were said to have been entertained in such a "pleasing manner and easy grace..." demonstrates the important role the home played as a social space during this time, as well as Sally's acceptance into a middle class community despite her working class roots. Each woman's own role in creating a comfortable and inviting space becomes evident throughout the home as is interpreted by her attention to design and cleanliness. The efforts a woman put into maintaining her household projected a sense of feminine morality and genteel refinement that the middle class sought during this time.⁶⁰

The Smith family had two parlors in their home before combining the rooms into one great room in 1905 when decorative styles changed.⁶¹ Prior to this time, however, it

can be assumed that the Smith's two parlors functioned as two totally different spaces. One parlor, likely the one at the front of the house, was meant for entertaining guests; the Smith's and their two small children would use the second parlor to pursue family activities.

The fact that the Smith's kept two separate parlors indicate that the family enjoyed some financial success and may also imply that they were among Salem's wealthier middle class citizens. The family's ability to afford to keep a room that would be used exclusively to receive and entertain guests indicates that the family had extra money—and extra square footage—to set aside for this purpose. As Grier remarks, setting aside such a space for entertainment represents a sacrifice within the family of utilitarian space for everyday use;⁶² only families with an abundance of living space and flexibility with their annual budgets could make such a sacrifice. Since fancy parlors called for special furnishing and expensive design elements, their maintenance demonstrates that the family had disposable income, which they were willing to use to purchase items that lacked practical function. Many middle class families in America during this time would not have had the space for a special parlor such as this and would have made do by setting aside space in the family parlor or dining room where they could comfortably receive guests.⁶³

The decoration of Sally's parlor would have revealed much about her to her guests. While there is no direct evidence of Sally's design choices, popular women's periodicals and mail order catalogs of the day offer an idea of popular styles during this time and some sense of how women were encouraged to conceptualize the decoration and

organization of their homes. The well decorated home included a mixture of purchased and homemade wares. Houseplants and homemade needlework pieces would be paired with mass produced furniture pieces with heavy architectural detailing.⁶⁴ Family photographs in fancy frames, mementos or family heirlooms, and the presentation of the family Bible all symbolized the decorator's commitment to her home and family, as well as her piety.⁶⁵ The Smiths added a piano to their parlor at the turn of the century, another popular purchase among the middle class during this time.⁶⁶

Sally completed a "neat set of table doilies"⁶⁷ as a gift to the winner of her Whist game and that signals to us that she spent some time crocheting and possessed some skill. It can be fairly assumed that she also decorated her parlor with other homemade pieces. Historically women's sewing, knitting, and crocheting served a utilitarian purpose but by the 1890s city dwelling Americans purchased most of their clothing at dry good stores within their cities.⁶⁸ Although some women may have continued to make their own clothing (patterns remained widely available through magazines, mail order catalogs, and dry goods stores) with their motorized sewing machines, many women preferred to purchase their clothing and saved their stitching to create ornamental pieces for their homes or to present as gifts. Quilt making, lace making, and needlepoint, all popular hobbies during this time, showcased their creator's skill, industriousness, and access to leisure time.⁶⁹

Sally's involvement in clubs, and her pursuance of hobbies, indicates that she was not tied exclusively to the care of her home but her duty as housewife would have been of primary importance to her and her husband and cannot be overlooked. The care of her

eight-room duplex and two small children required her special attention and her employment of a live-in servant shows that she also served in a supervisory capacity.

Perhaps the greatest symbol of the Smiths having risen to the middle class is their live-in domestic. Fred Smith recorded a number of very brief entries regarding the hiring, dismissing, and sometimes disappearance of hired domestics who worked in his family's home. Between the years 1890 and 1902, Smith made note of a half dozen women hired to serve his family. His mention of these domestics remained brief and he was largely content to report only the problems his family had when hiring help, when the family was without a domestic, or anything that may have created a hardship for the family. Fred Smith's interest in the hiring of a family servant is evident in the fact that he records events within his journal but it is important to stress that this does not imply that he took on this role in the place of his wife. Smith's journals are filled with passing accounts of his day and events going on around him. Sally Smith would surely have taken on this role as part of her domestic duties, though her husband's record of hiring events shows some interest in household duties.

An ad clipped from the *Salem Evening News* and glued into one of his journals in the summer of 1896 shows that the acquisition of domestic help weighed on Smith's mind. The ad reads: "Families needing work done, such as sweeping, washing, cleaning, etc, will help the work of the associated charities by applying at the room, 175 Essex Street where a list of persons needing work can be found. No Charge is made."⁷⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century it was very common for middle class households to hire domestic servants. Certainly there were some families who truly

required the assistance of a domestic while other families added them to improve their own standing within their respective communities. The use of a domestic servant indicated to friends and neighbors that your family was comfortable enough financially to burden itself with the weekly pay of a domestic servant.⁷¹ Middle class housewives, many of whom occupied their days at women's clubs or entertaining friends or their husbands' business partners, viewed the domestics in their homes as necessities and were somewhat unwilling to dispense with them.

Dudden effectively describes how domestics were treated on the job, pinpointing what inspired them to stay or leave for other professional opportunities. In addition to domestics who left their posts as a result of cruel treatment, Dudden describes how some of these women jumped from employment at one house to another seeking higher wages, while others left domestic employment altogether for opportunities in factories or to serve as clerks in newly emerging department stores.⁷² The Smith family may certainly have been experiencing this when their domestics left, or failed to arrive for, hired duties.

It is possible that Sally Smith easily identified with the heavily documented "servant problem" of the day, which discussed the transient quality of many domestics, their desire for more pay, and a perceived lack of loyalty to their jobs.⁷³ When a domestic left her post the mistress would have taken on all household duties until a replacement was found. The lack of household help could have easily made her amenable to discussions about domestics, which were repeatedly debated upon in the pages of women's magazines during this time. Magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal*,

McClure's, and *Harper's Bazaar* all discussed the “servant problem” to their middle and upper middle class readership.

The spring of 1899 appeared to have been an exceptionally hard time for the Smith family to hold on to their household servants. On April 28, 1889 Smith wrote in his journal, amid measurements for an electrical fitting from a worksite, “Celia our work girl left today.”⁷⁴ Throughout the journals for the previous ten years, Smith had not once mentioned a domestic, and he would not do so again until the following year.⁷⁵ On April 13, 1899, Smith wrote his first of several entries documenting the trouble his family was having holding on to domestics. On this day Smith wrote: “Mary our work girl left this afternoon.”⁷⁶ A month later it appears they had found a replacement for her but she failed to arrive for work, “Hired new work girl ‘Hannah’ today. She did not come.”⁷⁷ Smith does not again mention a domestic until 1901, when he reports that his live in maid, Maggie McCarron, returned from a vacation on May 17. Interestingly, Smith never mentions the hiring of Miss McCarron, although we know from the census records that she was living in the home in 1900.⁷⁸ Maggie stays in the Smith’s employment longer than any other domestic but her departure escapes notation in Fred’s diary. On September 29, 1904 Smith notes that Ellen Gallagher had “come to work”⁷⁹ and, although she clearly has been hired to replace Maggie, there is no discussion of why Maggie left.

Sally’s responsibilities within her home would have changed depending upon whether or not a domestic was employed. Cooking, cleaning, laundry, the running of errands, and childcare would have required daily or weekly attention. A live-in domestic

would have been responsible for household chores that Sally found less desirable. Labor-intensive tasks frequently appeared on a domestic's "to do list." Chores likely included sweeping and mopping, rug beating, soot removal (be it from cooking or lighting apparatus),⁸⁰ and laundry—the housekeeper's most dreaded chore.

The accessibility of ready-made clothing during this time meant that most city dwelling families had more articles of clothing than their parents. Also, white-collar workers required clean clothing daily in order to meet professional standards and their detachable collars and cuffs quickly added to a family's laundry pile. Although washing machines with wringers were available for purchase during this time, housewives still despised the chore and saved it for their domestics. In families where domestics were not employed, a "laundress" was often hired weekly or the laundry was "sent out" to be done by a commercial laundry or a laundress who worked in her own home.⁸¹ Laundresses remained the most popular of specialized servants during this time because washing clothes was physically demanding and most loathed by mistresses.

The Smith's domestic likely did the family's washing and when one was not employed at the home it is likely that Sally utilized the services of a laundress rather than completing this chore on her own. Laundry was considered a household's hardest chore during this time. By the 1890s the standard of cleanliness in the United States had risen substantially. The Smith's hiring of a single maid implies that Sally did not rely solely on domestic service in her household. Childcare and cooking were chores that most middle class wives happily tended to and Sally likely did herself or with minimal assistance by her employee. Wives continued to prepare their family's meals and many women prided

themselves on their cooking and baking abilities.⁸² Ready-made foods and the availability of cookbooks made cooking more accessible and, although cookstoves were hard for some to operate, a talented cook would have been highly revered within her social circle.⁸³ Additionally, women were being warned against commercial food production and were instructed by women's magazines to safeguard their family's health by directly overseeing their family's food preparation.⁸⁴ Sally likely cooked her family's meals but would have requested the service of her domestic when entertaining; Sally's Whist party would have found her maid cooking, serving, and cleaning up well into the night.

Perhaps Sally's largest responsibility within the home was the care of her two children Grafton and Putnam. Sally was responsible for creating a loving home that would not only meet her sons' physical needs but also foster their spiritual and educational growth.⁸⁵ The family's membership at Salem's Methodist Church signals to us that Sally would have been responsible for raising her sons with strict Protestant values. Middle class parents were expected to groom their children for college, as higher education was a demonstration of middle class gentility and prepared their children for profitable jobs as adults.⁸⁶

By the 1890s the importance of leisure time and play was well regarded for creating familial harmony and creating well-adjusted children.⁸⁷ Parlor and lawn games were popular during this time and were intended to create a sense of family fun and community. By 1890 board games were also popular and Salem was home to the premier board game maker Parker Brothers. Created by Salemite George S. Parker and his two

brothers in 1898, Parker Brothers produced a variety of popular board games, including *Office Boy*, *Klondike*, and *War in Cuba*. The Parker Brothers also produced one of the first ping-pong games available for home purchase in 1902, similar to one first showcased at the Colombian Exposition.⁸⁸ These games were manufactured in downtown Salem and sold in local stores or via mail order.⁸⁹ Various other games hit the market during this decade, encouraging indoor or outdoor play and promoting family bonds through shared leisure time.

Sally likely played with her children in addition to performing most other caretaking duties and childcare duties. Leisurely pursuits were sought both inside and outside of the home. The Salem Willows, an amusement park built in 1888, enjoyed great popularity among Massachusetts' north shore residents. Easily accessed by trolley, the park had rides, including a carousel, arcade games, picnic grounds, ocean access for swimming in the summer and an ice skating rink for winter months. [see maps 5] The Smith family enjoyed bike rides downtown, too.

The Smith's even enjoyed some getaways, including trips to New Hampshire and New York City. In 1896 the Smiths and their friends the Temples leased a summer cottage for a seasonal fee of \$155 at Ashbury Grove, an additional sign of the Smith's wealth and their middle class status. Ashbury Grove was a Methodist summering community located close to Wenham Lake in nearby Hamilton, Massachusetts. Smith records that his wife, Mrs. Temple, and the children stayed at the summer cottage all summer long while he and Mr. Temple remained in their Salem homes during the week and joined their families on the weekends.⁹⁰ Smith records that he had a phone installed

at the summer home, at his cost, in order to ensure easy contact with his family while he was away. This note shows that the Smith's had money for such an expense and that they had developed a dependence on this technology.

While the Smith's readily spent money on home improvement projects, technology, and leisure items, family illness revealed their true financial vulnerabilities. Fred Smith did occasionally hire a nursemaid to provide care to his two children his and wife. On occasions when one of Smith's two children or wife was ill Smith hired a nurse to come and stay at the house and care for the sick party. Smith carefully recorded all illnesses suffered by family members in addition to the name of the hired nursemaid, length of her stay, how much he paid for her service, and the date of her "discharge."⁹¹ His sons contracted the measles in the summer of 1895 and the mumps in the spring of 1898. In the summer of 1899, a doctor operated on his appendicitis, the surgery taking place in the family home. Families often hired nursemaids to care for sick family members order to lessen the burden on the wife or the existing domestic. Dudden explains that families were encouraged to hire nurses in order to provide the best care for the sick and to prevent the family's domestic from becoming overwhelmed by extra tasks due to household illnesses.⁹² Even in cities, where hospitals and doctors were plentiful, nurse maids were hired to keep loved ones at home and the cost of care lower. Salem Hospital was established in 1874, but Smith's decision to have his wife and child cared for in their family home was a more common option.

In the fall of 1902, Fred nearly lost both Grafton and Sally to scarlet fever. Fred and Putnam left the house to stay with Fred's mother while Grafton and Sally remained at

the Piedmont address to be treated by two nursemaids, the “Miss Youngs.” Fred does not include detailed notes about the illness, although on February 9, 1902 he records a touching scene of him, his mother, and Grafton “sitting atop the piozza [sic]” to speak with Grafton “through the window.”⁹³ The two nurses were paid \$202 for their eleven weeks of service and were discharged by Fred Smith on March 6th after completing the required fumigation procedure of the sickrooms at Piedmont home.⁹⁴

Maggie McCarron served as the family’s domestic when scarlet fever hit the Smith home. It is unclear where Maggie went during this time, although it is unlikely that she would have willingly stayed in the home amid such contagion. Domestic in the same situation would have opted to return to their own families or seek employment elsewhere to avoid contracting the disease. And, since all the needs of Sally and Grafton would have been met by the two nurses hired for their care, her presence in the home would not have been needed even if she was willing to stay behind. Maggie may very well have joined Fred and Putnam at Fred’s mother’s home because in June of 1902 Fred mentions that Maggie left for vacation to see her family in Canada so she had remained in his family’s employment through this time.⁹⁵

While his wife and son convalesced, Smith recorded the sale of his stock in an area farm, and the receipt \$670 for its sale. Smith reported that he invested in this farm around 1892, but his earlier diaries make no mention of his initial investment. The following month he sold additional stock in the “American Puuriante [sic] Companies” but does not record how much he netted in this sale.⁹⁶ One wonders if these sales were necessary in order to

pay the medical bills of his sick son and wife although he does not make this link in his diaries.

A payment of \$200 for medical care, in addition to medicines and related supplies, would have been a heavy financial burden for most American families during this time. When scarlet fever hit the home of a laboring family, the result to most infected parties was death. Their living spaces bred disease due to close quarters and limited resources. Additionally, this class was rarely able to afford expensive treatments. To treat a person suffering from scarlet fever, the sufferer had to be kept under strict observation. This required manpower and usually led to the employment of one or more nursemaids. The observation of the stricken was necessary in order to determine treatment. A strict diet was often prescribed, with an emphasis on the avoidance of food, liquor, and spices. Bloodletting and emetics were commonly prescribed to purge the body during this time as well.

Even within many middle class homes the sickness may have claimed some members when funds were depleted and appropriate care was no longer affordable. The fact that Smith needed to sell stock demonstrates to us that while he enjoyed a comfortable upper middle class life, he occasionally struggled financially to properly care for his family.

Grafton suffered from typhoid fever in the fall of 1904. Fred hired Miss Agnes Gaumwell, who was paid about \$100 to nurse Grafton for five weeks until she left, and another nurse, Miss Lilia Shepard, was paid \$50 for her services until she left on

November 29th. During the following weeks, Fred writes in his diary that Grafton's illness continues and that he is suffering "setbacks." Despite this, Fred makes no mention of hiring another nurse, and Grafton is not deemed fully recovered until after Christmas that same year. It is unclear why Fred did not hire another nurse while his son remained ill. The financial burden of prolonged illnesses could easily decimate middle class finances. Although he does not mention it, it can be assumed that Sally became her son's nursemaid until he made a full recovery.

It is hard to determine what kind of employers the Smiths were. The frequent turnover of staff within their home is not a fair measuring stick to use to determine their treatment of hired domestics; high turnover was common during this time as domestics searched for better work conditions.⁹⁷ Sally's expectations as mistress of the house are lost to history because of her husband's failure to report on them. The diaries of Fred, however, reveal a complex character, which may offer us some indication about his role of master in his house.

Smith is a well-known businessman and community member who frequently attended and hosted important events in Salem. This may imply some rigidity as a master, since coworkers and business partners that visited his home would likely have evaluated him in part based upon their visit. Part of what they experienced would be the work of his wife Sally, while the other part would be the work of his hired help. The graciousness of their hosts would be conveyed to visitors through the ease of conversation, the comfort and warmth of the parlor, and the preparation and presentation

of party fare. Although Fred may not have verbalized his expectations of these gatherings, his wife certainly would have understood the importance of these events and how they could influence her husband's working relationships and reflect on her as a lady. Her instruction to her maid and her own labor would have ensured that proper etiquette was followed in party preparations.

In regards to day-to-day activities, Fred may well have been a hands-on master. He wrote down or clipped and pasted hundreds of home advice suggestions in his diaries. From home made cleaning solutions to health tonics, he read his newspaper daily looking to resolve a number of household problems and likely drove his wife and servant batty by presenting them with alternative cleaning suggestions. Articles included advice for cleaning grease spots, sanitizing sponges, mending broken china, "properly" cleaning wood floors, and removing stains and tar from clothing.

Fred Smith could also be found in the kitchen from time to time. In 1900 the Smith's good friends and neighbors, the Temples, moved from Salem to Dorchester and, as previously noted, Smith recorded in his diary that he purchased a refrigerator from them for \$15.⁹⁸ Refrigerators were not at all common in households during this time. Some households had iceboxes but still many more families shopped daily for their meals. Refrigerators were thought preferable to iceboxes during the 1890's because of an ice shortage, which made the iceboxes almost unusable, as ice was expensive and hard to obtain.⁹⁹

The addition of a refrigerator to the Smith household guaranteed some freedom from the drudgery of daily shopping since food items could be preserved in the

refrigerator and protected from the decay brought on by the exposure to air.¹⁰⁰ Still, its reliability appears questionable as Smith continued to write in his diary a number of kitchen tricks to preserve food longer including one troubling recommendation to “add Borax to your butter to make it last longer.”¹⁰¹ Smith also recorded in his diary twelve separate egg-pickling recipes between 1890 and 1914 and frequently recorded that he had “put down” several dozen eggs.¹⁰² Smith also records occasional purchases of potatoes from coworkers which he stored in the family’s root cellar; an old fashioned practice of burying root vegetables in bins of sand protected vegetables from moisture and preserved them through winter.¹⁰³

In addition to recipes for cleaning solutions and food preservation, Smith recorded instructions for making a number of health tonics. It is unclear if these remedies were to be prepared for his use or his wife’s consumption, but since a number of them advertised relief from “nervous conditions,” and Fred frequently writes that Sally suffers from headaches (or “brain trouble”) or that she is “sick again,”¹⁰⁴ these potions may have been meant for her.

Nervous conditions, heavily documented among women at the time, were according to their contemporaries commonly found among women who were not content to be “women, wives, and mothers” but who sought to become “voters and reformers.”¹⁰⁵ Many women who voiced dissatisfaction in their home lives, but lacked the means or support within their families to pursue education, employment, or reformist activity, suffered from depression and were “treated” through isolative therapies.¹⁰⁶ We do not know if Sally was a contented housewife or if she craved work outside of her home.

There is no evidence that she participated in any city reforms or that she was a champion for women's suffrage. She may have desired the chance to pursue any number of causes but lacked the support and/or courage to do so, resulting in depression or lethargy. Or she may have simply been a sickly woman, content in her role as caretaker of her home and family.

Whatever Sally's own view of her own domestic life may have been, those around her would surely have envied her position. Although they are decidedly middle class, the Smiths socialized among the city's wealthier and public middle class citizens. Both she and her husband had risen from the modest roots of the laboring class to create a comfortable life for themselves and their two sons. They purchased a modest duplex and slowly renovated and refurnished it until it met their needs and the middle class aesthetic for the day.

The Smiths' lives were changed dramatically by the commercialization and availability of electricity. Fred Smith not only made his living from the growing popularity of this new technology but he and his family enjoyed the use of electricity to purchase things for their home and make their own daily lives contented. They consumed mass produced household technologies and allowed these technologies to change the way they lived their lives. They used domestic labor to lessen the burden of Sally's daily responsibilities and promote their own status within their middle class community. They found themselves in a position to enjoy indoor and outdoor leisure time and activities and traveled regionally to vacation and visit family. All these things

indicate the Smith's focus on family growth and stability in a growing middle class lifestyle.

The Smiths enjoyed enough financial success to purchase new technology for their home including electricity, a refrigerator, and new cook stove. They possessed enough wealth to hire domestics to lessen Sally's burden of labor and to increase the comfort of their home. They happily filled their home with leisure and luxury goods, including a piano, bicycles, and cameras, as they pursued the newly formed ideal of the "American Dream." At the same time, however, their finances limited them during sickness, resulting in the sale of valuable stocks and investments. Their income likely also prevented them from taking expensive vacations such as tours of the American West or Europe like their more wealthy contemporaries were enjoying. Still, the Smiths were living comfortably in comparison to the city's laboring class and even most of their middle class brethren. Their lifestyle mirrored that of wealthier community members in some ways, though they would never reach the financial comfort or stability of one of the city's wealthiest families, the Ropes.

¹ President Cleveland is reported to have "switched an electronic switch" upon the opening of the fair which lowered flags, revealed the statue Republic, and fed water to the many fountains within the fair. As described by Melinda Gilpin from Bowling Green State University, <http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/acs/1890s/chicagowfair/worldsfair.html>, accessed on April 20, 2009.

² Detailed lists of events and exhibits were published for fair goers by Hubert Howe Bancroft in his tour booklet "The Book of the Fair," (The Bancroft Company: Chicago & San Francisco, 1893) which is currently available online at the Paul V. Galvin Digital History Collection provided by the Illinois Institute of Technology at <http://columbus.gl.iit.edu/index.html>, site accessed on April 20, 2009.

³ For more information about the role of women (and exhibits for women) at the Columbian Exposition see "The Book of the Fair," pp. 257-303. For more on the role of African-Americans at the Exposition please see Christopher Robert Reed's essay "The

Black Presence at 'White City:' African and African American Participation at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, May 1, 1893 - October 31, 1893." Available online at the Paul V. Galvin Digital History Collection provided by the Illinois Institute of Technology at <http://columbus.gl.iit.edu/reed2.html>, site accessed on April 20, 2009.

⁴ Including countries from South America, Europe, and Asia.

⁵ David E. Nye, *Electrifying America: The Social Meaning of a New Technology: 1880-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), pp. 72-79.

⁶ Susan Strasser, *Never Done* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1982), p. 73.

⁷ The Vanderbilts were among these first families to have electricity although after a small electrical fire started in their home in the 1880's, Mrs. Vanderbilt had the electrical fixtures removed, fearing that a larger fire would consume her entire home. Ibid, p. 76.

⁸ See Pricilla J. Brewer, *From Fireplace to Cookstove* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), pp. 13-14.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Edison as quoted in *Never Done*, p. 73.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Susan Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed: The Making of the American Mass Market* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), pp. 90-94, 159.

¹³ For more about the rise of American consumerism see Elizabeth White Nelson, *Market Sentiments* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004), pp. 81-130 and *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, pp. 89-202.

¹⁴ Jessica H. Foy and Thomas J. Schlereth ed., *American Home Life, 1880-1930* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), pp. 229-231.

¹⁵ As technology improved, women were compelled to meet a higher of standard of cleanliness in the home. New appliances were meant to make housework lighter, easier, and quicker and new inventions for the home were advertised for their ease of use. For example, the introduction of the vacuum cleaner advertised easy use, which compelled its owner to vacuum weekly whereas, prior to the inventions, women often cleaned their carpets seasonally because of the work required to complete the task. See *Never Done*, and Ruth Schwartz Cowan's *More Work for Mother* (London: Free Association Books, 1989), for more information on how these technologies required women to do more weekly chores in the home.

¹⁶ "The Book of the Fair," p. 9.

¹⁷ GE ad published in *McClure's*: "The Lamp That Lights the Way to Lighter Housework," *McClure's*, September 1917, p. 55. See also Susan Strasser's discussion of this advertisement in *Never Done*, pp. 76-78.

¹⁸ See Ruth Schwartz Cowan's argument about the ineffectiveness of household technology as argued in her thoughtful study of households and technology *More Work for Mother*.

¹⁹ Faye Dudden, *Serving Women* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), pp. 108-126.

²⁰ *Never Done*, p. 76.

²¹ "The Book of the Fair," p. 7.

²² Tim McNesse, *The Robber Barons and the Sherman Antitrust Act* (New York: Chelsea House Publications, 2008), pp. 46-52.

²³ S. Fred Smith's many diaries include a number of newspaper articles (some undated) which discuss the many conversations cities and towns were having on the North Shore about municipal decisions to transfer to electric for city lamp power after seeing the benefits of electric being used to power city trolley systems. See *S. Fred Smith Diaries #1&2*, Philips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

²⁴ As listed in the 1860 US Census.

²⁵ Smith's diaries reveal a working relationship with the neighboring cities of Peabody and Lynn. Ibid. Although in *Diary #5*, Salem was reprimanded for using Boston and Lynn poles to hang their wires and was required to remove its wiring from their poles in 1893.

²⁶ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #4*

²⁷ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #5*.

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ See *S. Fred Smith Diary #1* and *Almy, Bigelow & Washburn. Fifty Years, 1858-1908*.

³⁰ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #1*.

³¹ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #5*

³² See advertisements in the *Salem Evening News* dated January 19, 1893, January 20, 1893, and January 27, 1893.

³³ Smith tells us that by this year 516 homes were electrified. *S. Fred Smith, Diary #10*, dated May 1, 1895.

³⁴ Smith clipped out and pasted dozens of newspaper articles about himself and his family into his many dairies.

³⁵ Both sons attended Harvard but only Grafton graduated from the University. The other son, Putnam, dropped out of Harvard to pursue employment at the Boston telephone company. Smith records the events, but not his opinion of the events. *S. Fred Smith, Diary #33*, dated October 20, 1913.

³⁶ Please see enlistment papers for George Gray dated September of 1864, muster papers for the Massachusetts 25th Infantry Company on June 29, 1865, and the 1870 census all accessed through Ancestry.com on September 11, 2009.

³⁷ 1880 US Census accessed through Ancestry.com on September 11, 2009.

³⁸ Immigration records for Ann Gray can be found on the passenger log for the ship *Boston* departing from Nova Scotia and docking in Boston on May 15, 1848. *Boston* passenger log accessed through Ancestry.com on September 11, 2009.

³⁹ See Susan Estabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did Was To Weep At Home* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 48-67.

⁴⁰ See Glenna Matthews, *Just a Housewife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 55 to read more about women maintaining their homes while their husbands were at war.

⁴¹ The 1880 Census does show that Sally attended school.

⁴² Or if he did keep journals during these years they have not survived or are in another person's possession.

⁴³ Throughout Smith's journals are dozens and dozens of newspaper clippings about trains, trolley services, electricity, and telephones. Smith includes clippings from all over the nation as states began acquiring new technology. Whether a city had acquired a new train engine or trolley car, or whether an electrician in Missouri fell to his death, Smith included the news clipping in his journal. In his 1895 diary a large article cut from a newspaper tells the scandalous story of a wealthy wife in NY who poisoned her husband but upon further inspection...the reader finds that Smith cut the newspaper for the story on the opposite side—Framingham had purchased a new train engine. Smith was a man obsessed by new technology. He records several entries of outings he has taken with his wife to "ride the new trains" or look at another city's power grid.

⁴⁴ Ellen Gruber Garvey, *The Adman in the Parlor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 106-111, 133-134.

⁴⁵ Please see Elaine Abelson, *When Ladies Go A-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 14-15 and Cindy Sondik Aron, *Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 16-17 who offer similar criteria for defining America's middle class during the Progressive Era.

⁴⁶ Please see Abelson, pp. 14-15 and Aron, pp. 16-17 who offer similar criteria for defining America's middle class during the Progressive Era.

⁴⁷ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #10*, dated July 10, 1895.

⁴⁸ See Chaim M. Rosenberg, *America at the Fair* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), p. 189 for more about the Singer Sewing Company and bicycles at the Fair. See also *S. Fred Smith Diary #12*; he purchased Sally's "Lennox Bicycle" for \$42.50.

⁴⁹ Leather workers earned around \$10 a week, making them Salem's highest paid labor force, but keeping them from affording a \$50 bicycle without hardship. John Roach, "Leather Workers," *The American Federationist*, Vol. 10, Part II (1903), p. 877.

⁵⁰ *S. Fred Smith, Diaries #11, #12, & #19*

⁵¹ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #14*, dated August 25, 1898.

⁵² History of the Kodak cameras is available online at http://www.kodak.com/US/en/corp/kodakHistory/1878_1929.shtml, website accessed on July 27, 2009.

⁵³ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #24*, dated November 7, 1904.

⁵⁴ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #18*, dated throughout October 1900.

⁵⁵ Home advice books instructed readers on the best way to care for their homes and appliances, to manage household servants, and to entertain guests. The majority of the readers of advice literature were middle class. In addition to popular magazines, such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *The Ladies Home Journal*, and the *Godey's Lady's Book*, booklets and pamphlets were published, and became popular gift items. Also at this time, the writing of Catherine Beecher and Lydia Marie Child were reprinted and happily consumed by a younger generation. Ellen M. Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), pp. 36-43, 141-156.

⁵⁶ As Mary Beth Norton argues in her work *Liberty's Daughters* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980).

⁵⁷ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic* (Williamsburg, Virginia: The University of North Carolina Press: 1980), pp. 256-258.

⁵⁸ See Katherine C. Grier's essay in *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p. 53.

⁵⁹ *S Fred Smith, Diary #7, Salem Evening News* article dated December 7, 1893.

⁶⁰ As is described by Candace M. Volz and Katherine C. Grier in their essays published in *American Home Life 1880-1930*, pp. 33, and 61-62. See also Dudden, p. 47 for a similar discussion on feminized space during the late nineteenth century.

⁶¹ Beginning about 1890 the parlor was becoming unfashionable in American homes and by the run of the century Americans began repurposing their living space to include more comfortably styles "living rooms" and the need for formal parlors became out of fashion. Many families began repurposing their formal parlors into more useable space. See *American Home Life 1880-1930*, pp. 47-70.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁶³ See *Ibid* p. 54 as well as the writings of Catherine Beecher who instructed middle class women to create space for entertaining in their homes without subscribing to the need for an additional room which she perceived as excessively wasteful and pretentious *House and Home Papers* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, and Co., 1869), p. 34.

⁶⁴ Popular mail order catalogs of the day show a number of "parlor suites" for sale many which mimicked European designs popular during the previous century. The furniture was formal looking and uncomfortable with lots of heavy carving and architectural emphasis. See for instance *Montgomery Ward and Company Catalogue and Buyers' Guide 1895* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 1895) or *1897 Sears Roebuck Catalog* (New York: Chelsea House Publishing, 1993).

⁶⁵ Grier speaks at length in her essay about the concept of the "Family Circle" in the parlor and how the arrangement of objects in this room signified to visitors a sense of morality and purity. See *American Home Life 1880-1930*, pp. 53-56.

⁶⁶ American production of pianos made them much more accessible to Americans in the 1890s. The Chicago World's Fair even showcased some American productions and by 1900 pianos were more easily acquired by middling citizens. See Rosenberg, pp. 245-249. The Smith's purchased their piano from a Boston store in 1904. *S. Fred Smith, Diary #23*, dated May 21, 1904.

⁶⁷ *S Fred Smith, Diary #7, Salem Evening News* article dated December 7, 1893.

⁶⁸ This was not necessarily the norm in more rural communities where women often continued to make their families' clothes due to expense or lack of access (although mail order services would soon make clothes-making obsolete). See Ellen M. Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America* (New York: Facts on File, 1997), p. 159 for additional information.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, pp.161-162.

⁷⁰ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #11*.

⁷¹ Thorstein Veblen wrote at length about the tendency of families to collect servants in order to give off an air of idleness and leisure and demonstrate an abundance of funds. Although Veblen wrote about wealthier subjects, this ideology can be applied to the

middle cases, also, who were compelled to hire domestics as a status symbol. *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; reprint, Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1998), 68-84.), pp. 21-41. Dudden describes this same issue applied specifically to America's middle class in *Serving Women*, pp. 104-192.

⁷² Dudden, pp. 55-60.

⁷³ Many employers felt betrayed by trusted domestics who left jobs with them for work within their homes. This was a common complaint among many employers. They were particularly upset when a domestics they felt they had "all trained up" left for another position elsewhere since they would have to train a new girl out of all her bad habits. C. H. Stone, *The Problem of Domestic Servant* (St. Louis: Nelson Printing Company, 1892).

⁷⁴ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #14*, dated April 28, 1898.

⁷⁵ Smith's inclusion of these events in his journal may reflect stressors experienced at home about not or not having additional help.

⁷⁶ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #15*, dated April 13, 1899.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, dated May 4, 1899.

⁷⁸ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #18*, dated May 17, 1901. See the 1900 US Census records that show Maggie [Mc]Carron as a resident at 7 Piedmont Street, residing with the Smith family.

⁷⁹ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #23*, dated September 29, 1904.

⁸⁰ See Susan Strasser, *Never Done*, pp.71-72.

⁸¹ Ruth Schwartz-Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, p. 98.

⁸² Ellen M. Plante, *Women at Home in Victorian America*, p. 142.

⁸³ Priscilla Brewer, *From Fireplace to Cookstove*, pp. 71-75.

⁸⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman was one of many activists who responded to concerns about food safety and meal preparation during the 1890s. Although she advocated for the (highly paid) professionalization of such tasks her writings indicate a strong response to voiced concerns about food presented at that time. See *The Home* (1930; reprint, New York: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), pp. 160-183 and *Women and Economics* (1898; reprint, New York: Prometheus Books, 1994), pp. 225-232.

⁸⁵ As is discussed at length in Colleen MacDonald's essay in *American Home Life 1880-1930*, pp. 168-180.

⁸⁶ See Burton J. Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1978).

⁸⁷ *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, pp. 148-152.

⁸⁸ See Donna R. Braden's essay in *American Home Life, 1880-1930*, p. 152 for more information.

⁸⁹ See Philip E. Orbanes's, *The Game Makers* (Cambridge: Harvard Business Press, 2003), pp. 1-50 for more history of the Parker brother's early business dealings.

⁹⁰ *S. Fred Smith, Diary # 11*, dates from April 28, 1896 to September 6, 1896.

⁹¹ *Smith's Diaries numbered 14, 15, 19, 20, & 24.*

⁹² Dudden, p. 131.

⁹³ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #19*, dated January 1, 1902 through March 6, 1902.

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- ⁹⁴ Fumigations after scarlet fever were commonplace and could be quite expensive. Common procedure dictated that the sickroom be fully disinfected by the application of concentrated solutions of powerful germicides to the floor, bed, walls, and furniture. Wallpaper was stripped and burned, and in most cases, furniture, books, and other possessions within the sickroom were also burned. This process was not only disruptive, but quite expensive, too. Julia Sarinson and Lucy Guppy, "The Fever Van," *Journal of Social Medicine*, 2003 April; 86(4): pp. 197-198.
- ⁹⁵ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #19*, dated June 4, 1902.
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid*, dated February 28, 1902 and April 7, 1902.
- ⁹⁷ See Dudden, pp. 44-71.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid, Diary #17*, dated April 2, 1900.
- ⁹⁹ Oscar Edward Anderson, Jr., *Refrigeration in America* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1953), p. 118.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 103-119.
- ¹⁰¹ *S. Fred Smith, Diary #14*.
- ¹⁰² *S. Fred Smith Diaries*, throughout.
- ¹⁰³ Historical and modernized root cellaring techniques are explained in Mike Bubel, *Root Cellaring* (New York: Storey Publishing, 1991).
- ¹⁰⁴ *S. Fred Smith, Diary # 8*, dated May 14, 1914.
- ¹⁰⁵ Edward E. Bok of the *Ladies Home Journal* as quoted in Scanlon, p. 94.
- ¹⁰⁶ Weir Mitchell was a celebrated doctor of the time who specialized in the treatment of "hysterical women." Mitchell popularly treated such famous women as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jane Addams, and Edith Wharton and he believed that the illnesses of these women were "exacerbated by their stubborn, unnatural imitation of men." Women were treated with a "rest cure" which required bed rest and isolation from their families. They were not permitted to do any household chores or to interact with family members. The cure also forbade women from any intellectual activities including writing, reading, or pursuing any personal interests for fear that an overactive mind would be too destructive and impede the healing process. This "moral medication" was intended to cure women of "selfish individualism." See Ann J. Lane, *To Herland and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990), pp. 108-117 and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, (1935; reprint, Salem, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc. 1972), pp. 88-89 & 96.

CHAPTER 4

“YOUR HOME IS TOO MODERN”

Before Eliza Orne Ropes died in 1907 she directed in her will that her home and its contents be given to the Essex Institute. Founded in 1821, the Essex Institute celebrated Essex County and its history through an extensive collection that included natural specimens, a significant library, and historical memorabilia. In 1860 the institute furthered its mission by committing to the presentation and preservation of regional art, history and architecture.¹ The Institute began openly discussing its intention to acquire historical homes in Salem beginning around 1900. The Ropes sisters, members of the Essex Institute, who also sat on its “History Committee,” were well aware of these plans and it was in this spirit that the sisters left their home to the Institute in hopes that their family residence could serve as a memorial to American decorative arts and architecture.²

The Ropes sisters understood the value of their family home and history to the city of Salem. They easily traced their family history back to the city’s infancy where direct ties to the city’s political and maritime communities are quickly made. The Ropes sisters came from the city’s oldest stock. They were “old money” and revered community members. Friends and neighbors would have noted how the sisters chose to

live their lives, including what technology they acquired and used in their home, while other community members looked to emulate their lifestyle.

Despite the Ropes' community standing, however, their special gift was declined. The Institute felt that the home was too modern due o massive renovations undertaken during the previous decade. As a result, in 1912 the home was set up on a private museum with the funds the Ropes sisters had left for its maintenance and opened, as Mary and Eliza had willed.³

The importance of the homes was not lost on recent historians, however. It is considered on of New England's most significant and thoroughly documented historic properties. It is well regarded for its architectural heritage, including the styling of four renovations in 1780, 1807, 1832, and 1893-1894. Since the home was donated fully furnished, it also holds a superb collection of American furniture and decorative arts; four generations of objects remain in the house for public perusal. A botanical garden in the colonial revival style was planted on the property in 1915 for the enjoyment of Salemites and visitors alike, as was also arranged for in Mary and Eliza's wills.

Though the Ropes Mansion was home to four generations, the family did not build the home. The home was constructed by Salem merchants John and Ebenezer Barnard around 1720 and sold to Judge Nathaniel Ropes II in 1768.

Located at 318 Essex Street, the house exemplifies Georgian design. The exterior of the home reveals rigid symmetry, with a central doorway and five bays of twelve pane windows. A gambrel roof, or a roof with a double pitch or slope, tops the house. A simple roof balustrade was added in 1790. The house includes paired interior

chimneys, allowing for the construction of a grand entryway just inside the home.⁴ The doorway is Greek revival, featuring a horizontal transom, or row of windows, and above that a semicircular or elliptical fanlight. The home's original design had eight rooms, but this space was expanded on final renovation in 1894.⁵

Nathaniel Ropes II, the family patriarch who purchased the home, was a judge and businessman. He graduated from Harvard in 1745 and returned to Salem to practice law. He served in the House of Representatives in 1760, the only public office he ever held, before being appointed to the Essex County Court of Common Pleas in 1761, and to Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas and Judge of Probate in 1766. In 1772 he resigned from all other posts and became a Justice of the Superior Court of Judicature.

In addition to working as a judge, he also operated a small store out of his home. The front west room of the house, serviced by a side entrance, allowed Judge Ropes to sell a number of dry goods such as fabrics, shoes, dressmaking materials, and sewing supplies. Judge Ropes married Priscilla Sparhawk, the daughter of a Salem minister in 1755. Together the couple had six children, three girls and three boys, including their eldest son called Nathaniel III.

In 1773 the Massachusetts General Court required that judges take no pay from the English Crown. Judge Ropes, a loyalist reluctant to refuse the King's Grant, drew hostility from the House of Representatives and Salem rebels. His loyalist sympathies were well known by his neighbors and colleagues. John Adams once visited Judge Ropes at his home prior to the Revolution, playing a game of cards and commenting that

Judge Ropes was an “amenable [man]...very respectable with virtuous character”⁶ despite his political leanings.

In 1774 Judge Ropes became one of the first to try a new small pox vaccine and as a result he contracted the disease. While he was suffering on his deathbed, an angry mob arrived at his Essex Street home demanding that he refuse the King’s Grant. The mob threw bottles and rocks at the house, insisting that the Judge come outside. As the family cowered inside, a domestic was charged to deliver the news that the Judge was close to death. The crowd, now satisfied with his condition, left. Judge Ropes died the following day, but not before formally refusing the King’s Grant and saving his home from seizure.⁷ Priscilla and her children fled to the neighboring town of Danvers for the duration of the American Revolution but returned to the family home after the war. Nathaniel III and his mother were responsible for the home’s first round of renovations, which took place sometime during the 1790s. The roof balustrade, a “simple arrangement of flat boards,” was added during this time and other alterations were likely made, though they remain undocumented.⁸

Nathaniel III and his mother continued to operate the dry goods business out of the family home after the war. Nathaniel III later became involved in a number of mercantile business ventures and enjoyed great financial success. Preferring country life to that of the city, he purchased a farm in Danvers in 1799 and moved there with his wife, Sarah Putnam, and his three children, Nathaniel IV, Sally Fiske, and Abigail Ropes. Sarah Putnam died in 1801 of an unknown cause and her husband married Elizabeth Cleveland in 1803. Nathaniel III died as a result of alcoholism in 1806. His widow

moved herself and her stepchildren to the Ropes homestead after his death, preferring the city to farm life.

Elizabeth Cleveland oversaw a series of changes to the house upon her arrival from the Danvers farm in 1807. During this renovation basic repairs were done on the home's two chimneys, the shop was removed and its side entrance walled over. In order to connect the former store space with the parlor located on the back east side of the home, two reeded archways were added on both sides of the existing fireplace, creating a front and back parlor.⁹ These renovations cost the family \$973, a considerable sum of money during this time.¹⁰

Sally and Abigail inherited the Ropes Mansion while their brother Nathaniel Ropes IV inherited the family farm in Danvers. After several disastrous business ventures in Salem and Marblehead, Nathaniel moved westward in hopes of finding success. He moved to Covington Kentucky in 1819 and became part owner of the Miami Distillery in Anderson, Ohio. He married an Ohio woman named Sarah Evans Brown and had nine children. Of these nine children, Nathaniel V, Sarah, Eliza Orne, and Mary Pickman figure most prominently in the story of the Ropes home in Salem.

In 1836 Nathaniel IV furthered his business ventures to include a shoe factory and crossed the Ohio River to live in Cincinnati. During the 1840s he purchased and operated a lard and candle factory, which proved his greatest success. By 1856 Nathaniel IV had amassed a sizeable fortune. He was a prominent member of Cincinnati society and became interested in the teachings of Swedish theologian Emmanuel Swedenborg and the Swedenborgian Church of New Jerusalem.¹¹

Sarah Ropes was born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1827. She was the first of Nathaniel IV and Sally Ropes' nine children. Nathaniel V followed three years later, then a second son, William, in 1836, and two more daughters, Eliza Orne in 1837, and Mary Pickman in 1843. Four more children completed the Ropes clan in Cincinnati in the following few years.

Sarah Fiske and Abigail Putnam remained in Salem in the Essex Street home that they had inherited upon their father's death. Sarah Fiske married her cousin, Joseph Orne, in 1817. Joseph Orne graduated from Harvard with a degree in divinity but made his money in Salem's mercantile industry. After their wedding, the newlyweds moved to his Washington Street home, which had been built by Samuel McIntire in 1795.¹² Sarah became pregnant shortly after their honeymoon and around this same time her husband Joseph became ill with tuberculosis. Sarah, still with child, returned to her family home on Essex Street while her husband was quarantined at their Washington Street home. Sarah gave birth to their daughter, Elizabeth, in the home on Essex Street in May of 1818. Joseph died the following September, likely never having had the opportunity to hold his daughter. Sarah and her infant remained at the Essex Street home with her sister and stepmother and sold the Orne house on Washington Street. Devoted to the memory of her husband, Sally never remarried.¹³

Elizabeth Orne was well educated and, due to her father's fortune and a substantial inheritance from her paternal grandfather, was considered the wealthiest young woman in Salem. She was an accomplished pianist and known for her love of poetry and study of religion. Elizabeth was considered a great catch in Salem society

circles. While visiting her mother's family in Ohio in 1842, however, she fell ill with consumption and died at age twenty-four. After her daughter's death, Sally left the young woman's bedroom unchanged. The room is bright and childlike, with striped pink wallpaper and watercolor prints of cats and dogs. An assortment of dolls and other toys remain in residence, along with a half dozen silhouette portraits of family members and friends. The room also contains Elizabeth's collection of seashells and her personal library of poetry and theology texts.¹⁴ Her pianoforte, made by Jonas Chickering of Boston, and songbooks remain in the home's front parlor where a portrait of her three-year-old self hangs on the opposite wall.

Sarah's sister Abigail Putnam, who was known to friends as "Nabby," never married. She lived on Essex Street with her sister and niece until her death. Little is known about Abigail aside from the fact that she and Sally were close friends and that she suffered a horribly painful death. In 1839, Abigail's dressing gown caught on fire as she walked past the fireplace in her bedroom. Although the fire was quickly extinguished, and she survived the blaze, she suffered a number of severe burns that became infected. She died from her injuries less than a week after the fire.¹⁵ Sally had a portrait of her sister created from her sister's death mask, which still hangs in the upstairs hallway.

From 1832 to 1836 Sally and Abigail oversaw a third round of renovations to the family home. During this renovations the interior rooms and central hall were repainted and papered. The front door was remodeled during this time as well; a "classically derived" recessed entrance with engaged Ionic columns supported by a full entablature

was chosen due in part to Greek revival architectural trends that were popular during this time.¹⁶

Nathaniel III's son, Nathaniel V, was born in Cincinnati in 1833. He attended Harvard University and graduated in 1855. While at Harvard he spent school vacations and summer breaks with his Aunt Sally in Salem. After college he returned to Cincinnati and worked at his father's candle and oil factory for about ten years. In 1866 Nathaniel V returned to Salem to care for his aging aunt. Nathaniel quickly became an active member of Salem society. He invested in real estate in Salem and became interested in the early rumblings of housing reform in Salem.¹⁷ He financed and built the housing units on Orne Square offering affordable housing to some working class families and sat as a board member for the city's YMCA.¹⁸ He lived in the Ropes home until his death in 1885. Upon his death, Nathaniel V left the family mansion to his three unmarried sisters, Sarah Putnam, Eliza Orne, and Mary Pickman.

The three sisters, known in Salem as the "sissies," moved to Salem in 1892 and the following year began substantial renovations to the home. The house itself was picked up and moved back from the street about thirty feet and set on a new foundation with a full basement. A McIntire inspired fence¹⁹ was built around the property during this time, central heating, electricity, and indoor plumbing were installed, and a two and a half story ell was added to the backside of the home.²⁰ On the first floor of the extension a china room, butler pantry, storage pantry, and fully modernized Victorian kitchen was built. The second floor held two bedrooms and a bathroom complete with a sink, toilet, and bathtub. Mary and Sarah Ropes occupied the two new bedrooms while Eliza took a

spare room in the original part of the home; the rooms formerly occupied by Abigail Ropes, Sally Orne, and Elizabeth Orne were left intact by the three sisters.

The top floor of the extension held servant quarters for their two live-in domestics. These final renovations met with the disapproval of the Essex Institute. The Ropes sisters had spared no expense in remodeling and modernizing their inherited home.

During the 1893-1894 renovations, the home's former kitchen was turned into the new dining room. The room's fireplace, once used for meal preparation, was reduced in size and a colonial revival mantle piece added for decorative flourish. Sally Orne, well known in Salem circles for her love of hearthside cooking, rejected the use of a cookstove;²¹ she was well known, even envied, for her fireside cooking abilities.

Until the time of her death in 1876, Sally, and presumably her domestics, cooked all family meals in the home's fireplace. When remodeling the dining room the sisters preserved a number of Sally's handwritten cookbooks. Preserved at the Phillips Library in Salem, they include recipes for everything from stews and roasted meats to jams and baked goods. Her numerous cookbooks include personal notes instructing recipe readers on how best to duplicate recipes to produce quality menu items, including how well she liked the dishes or how she improved upon recipes. Sally exchanged recipes with friends and neighbors, often naming the person who sent her a particular recipe once she transcribed it into her notebooks.

When the sissies inherited the family home the house lacked modern cooking facilities, largely because Sally never saw the need for a cookstove. The sissies' renovation plans included a modern kitchen. The home's former kitchen became the

family's new dining room since the planned extension would house modern kitchen facilities. The sisters' fondness for their Aunt Sally, and their understanding of her hearthside cooking skill, led them to leave the fireplace trammel rod and other cooking materials as a tribute to their aunt's culinary skill in the new dining room's fireplace.²²

The remodeled dining room was connected to the new kitchen by a butler's pantry. Butler's pantries became popular service spaces in the homes of wealthy Americans by the 1870s and were based upon service pantries common in English manor houses during the previous century.²³ The butler pantry provided additional preparation space for domestics serving meals to homeowners and guests. The Ropes' butler pantry included a sink, additional counter or workspace, and built-in cabinetry that held china and glassware used for everyday meal service by the Ropes sisters.

A second pantry, a kitchen pantry, was built across the hall from the butler pantry and offers additional storage space. The kitchen pantry held a variety of kitchen and cooking objects collected by the family from the late 18th to the early 20th centuries. Today the room holds an impressive collection of cooking objects that remained in the family for four generations. Iron, tin, pewter, brass, copper, wood, and lacquered cooking, storage, and service objects still are on display in this single room. Additional counter space and cupboards allowed for easy storage and access to flour, sugar, and other items purchased in large quantities.

While appreciating the old practices, the new kitchen was a large space designed with popular Victorian sensibilities. Outfitted with interior plumbing, hot and cold running water, electricity, and indoor ventilation, the home became an entirely

modernized space. On the north wall of the kitchen, they installed a wood paneled counter unit with a large sink. This counter space overlooked the family's kitchen garden (the same area that would later become the Ropes Memorial Garden). The east wall of the kitchen had a McGee Grand coal-fired cast iron cookstove, as well as a water heater with a copper water storage tank. The water heater and connected pipes forced hot water upstairs, providing hot and cold water to the newly installed bathroom on the second floor of the new extension. Also on the eastern wall, an electric call system was mounted, allowing the sissies and guests to call domestics to other rooms of the home for service.²⁴

In the center of the kitchen was a distressed wooden table likely used by Aunt Sally in the original kitchen space. The kitchen's east and south facing walls are free from any fixed structures, although a small freestanding storage cupboard occupies the south wall. The room also holds an assortment of mismatched household furnishings believed to be remainders of furniture owned by earlier generations.

A large china cabinet was also constructed as part of the 1893-1894 renovation. This room is possibly the home's most stunning space despite the fact that its creation was not an initial part of the sisters' plans. While removing belongings to prepare the house to be moved back away from the street, the sisters made a remarkable discovery. In the attic they found a number of pine crates holding their Aunt Sally's wedding china, crystal, and glassware.

At the time of Sally's marriage to Joseph, Joseph ordered a set of Nanking pattern china for his bride. Nanking china was very popular throughout Europe and the United

States during the early half of the nineteenth century. This style, made by the Chinese exclusively for export to western markets, is the beautifully dark blue translucent pattern frequently referred to as “Blue Willow” china. Joseph Orne ordered two sets of this china including thirty platters of varying sizes, a half-dozen tureens, small covered dessert cups, hot water plate warmers, dozens of soup bowls, dinner plates, dessert plates, and handle-less eastern styled teacups. The order included three hundred and eleven pieces in all. In addition to the china, Joseph Orne ordered for a set of Irish crystal; jelly glasses, custard cups with covers, lemonade glasses, and an assortment of wine glasses and stemware for his new bride.

Because ships traveling to China were at sea for a year or two years at a time, the china was not delivered to Sally until after the death of her husband in 1818. The Irish crystal arrived after Joseph Orne’s death as well. Consequently, all the items were stored in the attic of the Ropes Mansion. Many of the crates were never opened and bore their original shipping labels. Once the sissies found them, however, they asked their architect to add a china room to the home’s addition so that they could display Sally’s collection of china and crystal.²⁵

In homage to Sally and Joseph, floor to ceiling dark mahogany cupboards built by D. F. Paige and Company cabinet makers of Boston line the north, south, and west walls of the room specially built to accommodate Sally’s wedding china and crystal. A French tea service set that Sally purchased in 1830 is also included in this room. The east wall of the China Room is lined with a row of windows overlooking a large porch also built during the 1893-1894 renovations. Cabinetry built in the butler pantry was also designed

and constructed by the D.F. Paige Company and matched the cabinets in the China Room. A freestanding hutch built in the same style occupies the dining room's south facing wall on the right side of the existing fireplace.

Nathaniel IV ensured that all of his children, including his daughters, were well educated. Mary attended the prestigious Mount Auburn Young Ladies Institute in Cincinnati, which enrolled the daughters of Cincinnati's most prominent businessmen. Established in 1856, the Institute provided higher education to young women. The school was headed by H. Thrane Miller and was known for its strict curriculum, which focused on science and mathematics. The Institute was located on twenty-three acres of land landscaped by a gardener and may have helped develop the love of botany that Mary shared with her younger sister Eliza.²⁶

Mary's leather bound notebooks and the grades from the semester ending May 25, 1860 reveal that she took a number of classes, including "Deportment, Reading & Spelling, Physiology, Latin, Algebra, and Composition." The report card reveals that the school offered a number of domestic classes that she did not take during that semester, including "Domestic Economy, Aesthetics, Music, Drawing, and Ornamental Needlework."²⁷ One would imagine that she did take one or more of these classes in previous school years.

Eliza and Mary enjoyed a number of close relationships with women they grew up with in Cincinnati. These women became occasional guests at the Ropes Mansion and they carried on a constant correspondence with one another.²⁸ Among these women are

Helen and Neary Rawson, who exchanged letters with Eliza and Mary regularly. Eliza and Helen appeared to have had the closest relationship of the four women.

The Rawsons grew up in Cincinnati and likely met the Ropes sisters through their involvement in the Swedenborgian church.²⁹ Unlike Eliza and Mary, Helen married and had a number of children. Correspondence between the two girls commenced when Eliza was abroad and continued once the three Ropes sisters moved to Salem. Helen discusses a number of things within her letters: international and domestic politics, travel, childcare, cooking techniques, and problems with domestic service.³⁰

In a letter written to Eliza dated September 3, 1899, Helen speaks with relief about her children being away and talks about how she has been kept busy caring for her home. She also explains to Eliza that she has been challenged with the “constant charging [sic] of help—with intervals of none at all—[which] has made the days in a week and two hours a day all too few and too short and time has never hung heavy on my hands as far as household duties went.”³¹

Helen also spoke about her and her husband’s trip to Europe. “It would make you dizzy if you only knew. Hurried from mid-ocean to mountain top and through churches then suddenly forced to admire a wonderful bargain in *gloves* [her emphasis] or the clever [arrangement] of trinkets in the little shops on the Rue Royale.”³²

It is unclear if the Ropes sisters appreciated the trouble that many of their peers had when it came to managing and keeping domestic help. The Ropes sisters kept two live-in servants, both Irish-born women. Lizzie Coyle immigrated to the United States in 1884 and Mary Kenny immigrated in 1894. Both women remained in service to the

family until the death of Eliza in 1907. The tasks of Lizzie and Mary likely included basic house keeping duties and laundry. It is likely that one of them also performed some basic cooking duties because, although the three Ropes sisters enjoyed cooking, they were not likely to have prepared all of their meals.³³

An undated letter from friend Neary Rawson shows the four women's interest in cooking. The stationery of the letter is from the Hotel Saint George in Algeria. The letter begins with a discussion of African and international politics, then moves on to begin a discussion of old fashioned cookery.

It appears that the Ropes sisters had sent a book to the Neary entitled "The Home Life in the Colonial Days." Neary goes on to thank Mary and Eliza for their gift, saying:

The main subject for which I have written is to thank you for the handsome book you sent us at Christmas. I have found much pleasure in the five illustrations. Many bring to mind the old fashioned household utensils my mother used in early days of her married life; for she began with a fireplace to cook and it was not until I was about four that she tried a stove, but she always said that the food had not the flavor of the bake kettle.³⁴

The Ropes sisters and their friends enjoyed cooking. They traded recipes and cooking tips with one another through frequent correspondence and many letters mentioned food and its preparation. An unsigned and undated letter written to Mary finds the author in Italy responding to inquiries Mary had made about the food and "whether their cook is a man or woman and whether or not she is any good." The author responds that the cook is married with two daughters (one being married to a banker and considered by the author to be "quite up in the world"). She notes that the cook goes to the market every day, recording her daily expenses for the family in a small notebook.

“You know that over here there are no ice-chests nor places to arrange for large quantities of supplies. In the basement is a room for provisions, but usually we renew our stores from day to day. For instance, when [our cook] wishes to make a cake or pudding she buys a kilo of sugar or flour. Once in a while she makes us a loaf of bread or biscuits. She can make excellent baking-powder biscuits. Butter and eggs she buys everyday. The milk woman comes twice a day with milk and cream, so that we never have sour milk left over. We buy two cents worth of *salade* [sic] for dinner, a cauliflower for ten cents some vegetables for soup for three and four cents and so on.”³⁵

The Ropes sisters used their aunt’s many recipes and converted them to use on their new cookstove. Aunt Sally preserved a number of dinner party menus, which the sisters kept and sometimes used to plan their own dinner parties. The sisters’ interest in cooking continued so that by 1899 Mary and Eliza had both taken up membership in a Cooking Club in Salem. Either Mary or Lucy Robinson, one of John Robinson’s two daughters, oversaw the Cooking Club.³⁶ John Robinson, a Harvard dropout, trained in botany, and was a close friend to Eliza and Mary Ropes. The *sissies* employed Robinson to design and landscape the large botanical garden after their deaths.

The Ropes sisters received invitations to the city’s Cooking Club, a club that brought Salem’s upper class together to exchange recipes and cooking tips. Like many women’s clubs popular during this time, these women met not just for fellowship but also to arrange monetary aid for any number of local charities. The Cooking Club hosted one such event in the spring of 1899. An invitation found among the Ropes belongings

requests that members of the cooking club attend a dance to be held at Hamilton Hall, which would “[give] aid [to] the visiting nurse fund.”³⁷

The Ropes sisters enjoyed membership to a local botany club as well, and Mary took French lessons from a local Salem woman. The Ropes sisters entertained guests for sewing circles and played hostess to friends visiting from the Midwest. Sarah, Eliza, and Mary enjoyed entertaining and understood that their family home was a significant showpiece. Their hostess skills are documented through a guestbook kept by the sisters. Guests began arriving for stays at the home after renovations had been completed beginning in 1895. A number of guests wrote a fond thank you to their hostesses, thanking them for the restful lodging and “pleasant memories.” When Helen Rawson visited her friends in the spring of 1895 she left behind a beautiful and thoughtful note:

I could not wish anyone a greater pleasure than a visit to
This dear old Salem—Here in this quiet old house, so
full of memories—I think I have a feeling such as a piece
of old lace might have—laid by in one of these mahogany
drawers scented with lavender—so contented and peaceful,
that I could almost hope I might never be disturbed but be
left here in quiet for the rest of my days.³⁸

Entertaining became an important part of the lives of the Ropes sisters. The decoration of their home was meant not only for their own comfort, and the preservation of their family history, but also to ensure a comfortable space for their many guests. In 1895, the year after the renovations ended, six guests arrived for extended stays at their home; many of these people were friends from Cincinnati.

Although the construction of the ell warrants a great amount of attention, the sisters did make a variety of other changes to the existing house. The house was entirely

outfitted with central heating and electricity during this time; the sisters converted all existing gas fixtures to electricity in order to keep most of the older lighting fixtures in the home intact.

While preserving the original character of the house, the Ropes sisters also valued the use of new technology, as is evidenced by their acquisition of modern appliances and technology. Eliza and Mary's interest in modern technology extended beyond their consumption, however; the three sisters were heavily invested in a large amount of municipal and technological stocks. Eliza and Mary both held thirty shares in stock of the Massachusetts Electric Company. They also purchased a large amount of stock in the Missouri and Kansas Telephone Company and held a number of municipal bonds for the cities of Cincinnati, Ohio, Melrose, Lawrence, Haverhill, Chelsea, Massachusetts, and Pawtucket, Rhode Island. Eliza held additional stocks in a number of railroad companies, including the NY Central, New Haven & Hartford, and Needson Railways.³⁹

Between their inherited wealth and their shrewd investments the Ropes sisters were very comfortable. Whereas middle-class families acquired leisure activities or traveled locally, the Ropes women, with all their monetary power, entertained themselves through extensive travels throughout the United States and abroad. Travel journals kept by Mary show that the sisters traveled throughout Europe. In the United States they went south to Florida and west to California. The sisters also took trips to Mexico and Cuba. With all their purchasing power, the Ropes demonstrated great amounts of generosity with their money both during their life and death. Eliza and Mary sometimes loaned

money to friends in need, as has been revealed by occasional correspondence from friends and acquaintances thanking the Ropes sisters for their kindness and generosity.⁴⁰

With the deaths of the three Ropes sisters their true wealth was revealed. When Eliza died in 1907 nearly two million dollars was split among a number of Salem and Cincinnati charities. The Ropes Mansion, along with all its contents, and a number of stocks and bonds left to help support the home's care, were all bequeathed to the Essex Institute despite their refusal to accept it.⁴¹ The Ropes sisters left \$22,000 to the Peabody Academy of Science and a large endowment to Harvard University. Mary and Eliza left their municipal bonds, which matured during the 1920s, to Salem Hospital, the Children's Friend Society, and the Bertram House for aged men in Salem.⁴²

The Ropes sisters were in a unique position within the town. They resided in an old family mansion in an adopted city, which was not their birthplace, but the birthplace of their father. Although they were not likely to be considered outsiders because of their family connections and wealth, they were not truly Salem stock. Their mother was born and raised in the Mid-west and the three Ropes sisters spent most of their lives in Ohio before traveling to Salem as older women. The Ropes sisters, considered by their contemporaries to be incredibly wealthy, transformed their home by both necessity and a desire for modernity. They did not seek technology or material goods to impress neighbors and visitors, nor did they hope to purchase their way into a higher class. On their deaths, the Ropes sisters requested that their home be given to the people of Salem, asking that it be set up as a museum, which ensured that persons of all walks of life have access to its beauty. The garden commissioned by the Ropes sisters, and built by John

Robinson in 1912 after their deaths, offered a public botanical space that is still a popular sitting area today.

The Ropes sisters understood their role in Salem society and their family's role in Salem's history. Three unmarried women living together and operating a single home space offer a frequently unseen glimpse into early twentieth century domestic space. These women were involved with charitable events and service, occupied their time through travel and membership to a number of societal clubs, and celebrated their own family history through the preservation of their family home, possessions, recipes, and family lore.

The Ropes sisters occupy a unique place in Salem society at the turn of the century. They occupy an important place in Salem history and enjoyed great domestic comforts through their inheritance and investments. The Ropes sisters also had plenty of money to spend. Though the three ladies were wise spenders, and not likely spendthrifts, they still would have made needed purchases within the city. Their house, recently renovated but fully stocked with the possessions of their ancestors, needed few decorations or adornments, but other daily needs likely brought them to the city's downtown shopping area from time to time.

Although there is no direct evidence placing any of the three Ropes sisters inside the doors of the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store, it would be nearly impossible to believe that they never shopped there. The sisters' good friend, John Robinson, was a favored patron of the store and he decorated an entire room through purchases made at Bunkio Matsuki's showroom at Almy's. Knowing that their friends made purchases

there, and understanding that the Almy store sought the patronage of all three classes, it seems likely that the Ropes sisters made occasional purchases there. The Almy store saw the opportunity to unite all classes under their roof through a desire for consumption. Although there is no evidence that the Ropes sisters consumed new materials for themselves or their home, there are items that the Almy store sold that they would likely have needed. By giving their business to this store, the Ropes sisters complete the cycle of class consumption in Salem.

¹The Essex Institute merged with the Peabody Museum in 1992, forming the Peabody Essex Museum. A brief history of the Peabody Essex Museum can be found on the Museum's website at www.pem.org.

² *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.*

³ The home opened to the public in 1930 and remained managed on the income generated by stocks and investments left for this purpose by the Ropes sisters. The house was later acquired by the Essex Institute in the 1970's and is currently managed by the Peabody Essex Museum. *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.*

⁴ Earlier building styles were often built with the chimney in the center of the home. See Bryant F. Tolles, *Architecture in Salem* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England: 1983).

⁵ The original floor plans are no longer available. The architect's plans for the 1894 renovations of the home remain at the Phillips Library and denote the homes original as well as expanded spaces.

⁶ John Adams as quoted in *The Ropes Mansion* (Salem: Essex Institute Press, 1977), pp. 4-5.

⁷ *The Ropes Mansion*, pp.4-5.

⁸ *The Ropes Mansion*, p. 4

⁹ Reeded is an architectural term, which means that the structure is convex, or "built up," rather than fluted or concave. Ibid, p. 6.

¹⁰ Receipts from these renovations can be found in the *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.*

¹¹ The *Swedenborgian* is a Bible based Christian church which has long focused on social issues using their services to encourage members to reach out to less fortunate members. They count many Transcendentalists among their members. Charlotte Perkins Gilman lived in a Swedenborgian commune in Providence as a child. Swedenborgian had additional missions focused on the disabled including communication processes

developed for Helen Keller. The teachings are based upon the writings of a Swedish scientist and theologian, Emmanuel Swedenborg, who wrote at the end of the 17th century. His teachings were carried to England and then to America. Some Swedenborgian churches established living communities for their members where the flock lived a communitarian lifestyle in their service to God. For more information please see the Swedenborgian Church website. <http://www.swedenborg.org/index.cfm> (site accessed on May 10, 2008).

¹² Orne's Washington Street home was built by *Samuel McIntire*. See Dean T. Lahikainen, *Samuel McIntire: Carving An American Style* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 2007), pp. 17-19 for more details.

¹³ Although this may appear to be an overly romantic sentiment, Sarah was truly in love with her husband and never overcame his loss. In 1839 Sarah commissioned a Salem painter, Abel Nichols, to paint her portrait as well as to create an aged portrait of her late husband (using a portrait painted of him during their honeymoon). The two paintings hang side by side in the main foyer of the Ropes home.

¹⁴ *The Ropes Mansion*.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 8-10.

¹⁵ See more about the Colonial Revival style throughout Bryant F. Tolles, *Architecture in Salem* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983).

¹⁷ *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 1*.

¹⁸ Nathaniel Ropes V obituary *Salem Evening News, January 1892*.

¹⁹ See biographical information about Samuel McIntire, Salem's revolutionary era architect, and his preferred artistic style as mentioned in the introduction to this study or see *Samuel McIntire: Carving An American Style*.

²⁰ *The Ropes Mansion*, p. 12.

²¹ Sally rejected the use of cook stoves despite the fact that they were commonplace in America by the 1840s and she would have easily afforded such an appliance. *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6*.

²² Ibid

²³ Catherine Seiberling Pond, *The Pantry: Its History and Modern Uses* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2007), pp. 41-61.

²⁴ Purchase receipts for the cook stove, water heater, and call service can be found in *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6*. Also, these objects remain on view today and can be seen by taking a guided tour of the house as provided by the Peabody Essex Museum.

²⁵ See *The Ropes Mansion* for narrative of the sissies' find, and *The Ropes Family Papers* for information about cabinetmaking.

²⁶ For more on the Mount Auburn School see *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 4*.

²⁷ *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 2*.

²⁸ See various letters received by Eliza and Mary and The Ropes Mansion Guest Book, *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folders 3 and 9*.

²⁹ As implied in letters written between the pair. *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 3.*

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ As evidenced by their membership in a cooking club and their use of Sally's recipe books. *The Ropes Papers, Box 15, Folder 7.*

³⁴ *The Ropes Papers, Box 15, Folder, 3.*

³⁵ The handwriting of this letter appears similar to that of Helen Rawson and it is possible that she penned this note. Found among personal correspondence in the *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 2.*

³⁶ It is unclear which of these two daughters organized the club. Little documentation about the club actually exists. The surviving invitation, which lists the return address as 18 Summer Street in 1899 lists a RSVP to Miss Robinson alone.

³⁷ *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 7.*

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Stock and investment information available in *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.*

⁴⁰ See travel diaries, *The Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder, 2 and 5* and *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 3*, for correspondence, which remark on loaned money.

⁴¹ Mary's will states her desire for the home to be used as a museum space. The will states the following: "...To the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass. I give my half interest in the house No. 318 Essex Street—the Nathaniel Ropes Homestead of four generation, with the ground under it and the garden attached to it, my one half also in the furniture, carpets, silver-ware, china, portraits, and other pictures, books, trunks of antique clothing, jewelry, bric-a-brac &c, &c that the house may not, in any degree, be dismantled but stand forever as a memorial to the family of Nathaniel Ropes. It is my wish the house shall be kept open to visitors, who may desire to see our collection of household antiques and a custodian shall live in the house for the care and the preservation of the same and its contents. It is my wish that no public meetings or crowded receptions shall be held in the house and that visitors shall not be admitted in crowds....in order that the Essex Institute may, without financial embarrassment, carry out the intention of the testatrix in making the above bequests, I give and bequeath to the Essex Institute the following real and personal property, the income of which can be applied to the support of the objects names above....[bonds, income based upon investments such property as Orne Square, 6 houses on Hathorne Street Nos. 5 ½, -9 ½, 8. Houses on Broad Street Nos. 5 ½-25 ½. Mary's will can be found among the *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.*

⁴² Stock and investment bequest information available in *Ropes Family Papers, Box 15, Folder 6.*

CHAPTER 5

“A REAL JAPANESE HOUSE”

In December of 1892 Bunkio Matsuki set sail from Boston to return to his native homeland of Japan. Matsuki, who moved to the United States just five years prior, returned to Japan on what was becoming an annual purchasing expedition. Matsuki arrived in Tokyo to acquire an assortment of Japanese wares to sell at the Almy store in Salem, as well as to expand his own export business in Boston. Matsuki's purchases included paper fans, jewelry, porcelain, clay pots, and fire screens—items seen as curios by an American intellectual culture, which sought entry into Japan through its material culture.¹ Americans readily consumed materials “from the home of the almond eyes” that were thought to be “exotic” or which were, according to advertising of the day, either “inexpressively dainty or absurdly grotesque.”²

While he was in Yokohama, a port city south of Tokyo, the Japanese government requested that Matsuki look over items being prepared for shipment to the Columbian Exposition. “I have been invited to inspect all the goods made for the World's Fare [sic],” he wrote to his friend and mentor Edward Morse, “but all [are] Yokohama muki.”³ Matsuki's choice of the term “Yokohama muki” is telling as it implies that the materials selected for the fair lacked authenticity to Japanese artistry and were rather produced

exclusively for export to Western markets.⁴ His use of the term “Yokohama muki,” is interesting also because his own business was largely based on the sale of similar materials. Although Almy and Matsuki advertised “authentic Japanese goods,” the crowds that gathered outside the Almy store for their very own piece of Japan bought instead items being cheaply and quickly produced by Japanese merchants; merchants who sought to exploit the same Western markets seeking to take advantage of them.⁵

Although Western intrigue with Asia was not new during this time, access to Japan remained somewhat limited until the country underwent political changes brought about by the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate and the subsequent rise the Meiji government in 1868. The Meiji Restoration, as it is referred, began as a result of Commodore Matthew Perry’s arrival to Japan in 1854.⁶ Meiji, or the “enlightened rule,” sought to create a modern government that embraced western technological advancements while remaining loyal to traditional eastern belief systems.

The Meiji government, ruling with the motto “fukoku kyokei” or “a rich country and strong military,” sought to strengthen their military through economic growth and used commercialized western powers as their model.⁷ The “Treaty of Friendship” signed between Japan and the United States after Perry’s arrival in Japan allowed for the exchange of consular officials between the two countries and lead specifically to an influx of American scholars to Japan. Mari Yoshihara notes in her study of American Orientalism that the Japanese government hired many Americans for consultation in the areas of language, law, engineering, and science.⁸ Additionally, Yoshihara observes that many of the men who went to Japan and became known as “pioneering ‘Japanologists’,”

were upper-class New England men. Bunkio Matsuki's Salem mentor, Edward Morse, was among those who traveled to study in Japan during this time.⁹

The Meiji government signaled the end to feudalism and by 1871 had lifted class restrictions in regards to both governmental and societal roles; legal equality became the right of every Japanese citizen during the Meiji Restoration.¹⁰ In an effort to further eradicate class hierarchy, the Japanese government in 1873 restructured the military by instituting a draft and denying the samurai the right to wear their swords.¹¹

Further demonstrating its willingness to engage the west, Japan participated in its first World's Fair at Philadelphia in 1876. Their exhibit was well received and lauded for its beauty and high quality of craftsmanship.¹² In preparation for the Columbian Exposition in 1893, Japan set aside 630,000 yen. Among the attractions in Chicago was the Ho-ö-den, or the Phoenix Building. Designed by Japanese government architect Kuru Masamichi, the building occupied two acres of land on the Wooded Island. The building was inspired by an eleventh century palace outside Kyoto and incorporated architectural details from the twelfth, sixteenth, and eighteenth centuries.¹³ The Ho-ö-den was made up of three buildings meant to mimic the shape of a Ho-ö, the mythological bird known in the west as the Phoenix.¹⁴

The building, constructed exclusively by visiting Japanese carpenters, cost the Japanese government \$100,000 to complete.¹⁵ The interior of the palace was decorated with ancient and modern art made by centuries of Japanese artists. Around the building was a reflective garden space planted using traditional Japanese design elements to create a peaceful and serene rest space for tired fairgoers.¹⁶

Ho-ö-den was not Japan's only contribution to the fair, however. In addition to Ho-ö-den, the 40,000 square foot showpiece, the Japanese used an additional 90,000 square feet of display space to exhibit goods in the Great Building of the fair.¹⁷ Exhibition items included a spectacular array of Japanese arts and crafts. Breathtaking metal work and lacquer ware were showcased next to magnificent woven and embroidered textiles and modern paintings were displayed alongside ancient masterpieces.¹⁸ Additional attractions on the Fair's Midway Plaisance included Japanese jugglers, traditional dancers in native dress, a ceremonial tearoom, and a Japanese Bazaar where inexpensive souvenirs could be purchased.¹⁹ Due largely to the creation of Ho-ö-den, Japan would be considered the Exposition's largest contributor and Japan left the structure intact at the conclusion of the fair as a gift to Chicagoans.²⁰

It is unclear what items Matsuki looked over during his February visit to Japan, though it is likely that he saw some of the items put on display in the Great Building, including some ceramics and porcelain. Despite the fair's catalog of many stunning pieces, the Japanese government also chose to display some less traditional items; pieces that would have been more recognizable to western audiences.

Matsuki was invited by the fair's commissioners to serve as a judge but he declined the offer due to other commitments. Matsuki did visit the fair, however, and received a "badge of silver" bearing "the sacred bird of Japan, the Phoenix" from fair officials for his service of looking over items while visiting Japan the previous winter.²¹ On September 29, 1893 *The Salem Evening News* published an article about his visit to Chicago. The article, entitled "A Talk on the Great Fair," found Matsuki displeased with

the pottery and ceramics on display at the fair, stating that items were “nothing above if not quite equal to that seen in Japanese shops.” He spoke highly about the architecture of the Phoenix building, the water color paintings from Japan’s modern painters, and the accuracy of the fair’s Japanese tearoom ceremonies, but told Salemites that overall “the Japanese had a thousand things to learn from American artists.”²²

In addition to the finery displayed at the fair were kitschy “Yokohama muki” for sale at the fair’s Japanese Bazaar. The Japanese worked hard to create beautiful and engaging space for visitors, but guests who arrived would have happily purchased non-traditional Japanese items as souvenirs.

The United States held a commercial interest in trade with the east since its formation. Privateering during the American Revolution showed American ship owners the wealth China and India had to offer. Trade with these nations strengthen America’s adolescent economy and simultaneously created an insatiable appetite for foreign goods. Americans sought Chinese tea sets and dinnerware, as well as “nakeen” fabric and beautiful silks.²³ Salem was no stranger to these mercantile pursuits. Salem’s wealthy women wore luxurious Indian linens and intricately carved ivory hair ornaments. They held elegant tea parties in their homes and served guests on expensive imported porcelain that their husbands special ordered from China.²⁴ Their city streets smelled of cinnamon and pepper, and post-Revolutionary Salem enjoyed the distinction of being a cosmopolitan travel destination.²⁵

The wealthy women of early America, and port cities especially, had a special interest in eastern trade; all luxury goods were highly desirable and demonstrated wealth

and prestige.²⁶ Eastern goods, when mixed with their newly built Georgian styled homes, demonstrated not only their own good taste but also their ability to afford luxury. For the men who traveled, their souvenirs became daily reminders of their successful careers, and for the women who stayed behind, the trinkets presented to them by their fathers, husbands, and sons offered them their only chance to experience distant lands.

In Salem at least, the riches of the east were not only consumed by the wealthy, but were enjoyed by the middle class. Local shops advertised a variety of items fitting a number of different price ranges. Women of Salem's middling class were drawn also to eastern goods. While they could not afford expensive porcelain dinnerware or similar finery, many of them owned a small item from the Orient such as a sugar bowl, teacup, or small lacquered keepsake box.²⁷

America's interest in eastern material culture continued far into the nineteenth century. When Japan opened its borders permitting commercial and intellectual trade in 1868, Americans were primed for consumption. Americans greeted Japanese goods with the same vigor they had Chinese and Indian exports, although frequently failing to see ethnic and cultural differences between them and grouping them together under the single term "Oriental." American Orientalism simultaneously created a market for Asian goods and alienated Asian immigrants as the "other." Nevertheless, the expanding consumerism of the late nineteenth century led to the large-scale domestication of Japanese goods.

American women had a particular interest in Japanese decorative items, which signaled to them a simpler time where craftsmen worked without the corruption of

technology.²⁸ When Japan opened to the west, its culture became idealized and then remade in western literature, painting, and theater. During this time the Impressionist artistic movement, heavily influenced by Japanese watercolor painting, became popular throughout Europe and the United States.²⁹ Claude Monet explored his love for Japanese design with his creation of *La Japonaise*, the famous portrait of his wife surrounded by Japanese fans and wrapped in a stunning red kimono. Giacomo Puccini penned his classic opera *Madame Butterfly*, then and since performed to sellout crowds worldwide.³⁰ In both cases the artists used popular Japanese images to idealize and simplify Japanese identity and culture.

While Japanese-inspired art and literature were welcomed into American homes, it was “Japanesque” styled items that conquered them. Items sold in stores such as porcelain, pots, and screens became popular items, though most items were not only inauthentic to Japanese design, as was mentioned earlier, but some objects were not made in Japan at all but were mass produced in the United States. A Rhode Island firm, Gorham Manufacturing Company, began manufacturing goods that were Japanese in feel though not in style. Many items used traditional Japanese motifs (such as dragons, bamboo, and cranes) but lacked authentic Japanese aesthetics. Gorham began manufacturing his Japanese inspired line in the 1870s and his items became popular in the United States among upper and middle class women.³¹

Meanwhile, in Japan manufacturers continued producing “Yokohama muki” items similar to those Matsuki viewed and purchased in Japan. Although those exports would have been created by Japanese persons, they were made for export and were not,

as Matsuki pointed out, authentically Japanese. A Japanese person looking at a “Yokohama muki” piece would find it hard to believe that such items were created by Japanese artisans; the finished products likely looked foreign to the few Japanese citizens who saw them. Still, American collectors ignorant of true Japanese artistry devoured such items. American women’s magazines of the day instructed readers to incorporate Japanese decorative items into their homes. Whether items obtained were made in the United States or in Japan, both wealthy and middle class women happily purchased Japanese inspired curios and in Salem it was Bunkio Matsuki who placed these items into their hands.

Matsuki was born in April of 1867 in Kai-Suwa Japan to a family of merchants and artists. He made his home on the shores of Lake Suwa in the Japanese prefecture of Shinano (modern Nagano) until 1882, when he moved to Tokyo to pursue training to become a Buddhist monk. While there, he studied sacred Buddhist texts and Chinese classics, and in 1883 he was sent by the order to Tsukiji, a foreign settlement in Tokyo, to learn English. While in Tsukiji, Matsuki had daily contact with Westerners and interacted with Japanese businessmen. Frederic Sharf, an art historian specializing in the Meiji period, suggests that Matsuki’s stay in Tsukiji exposed him to a wide range of entrepreneurial opportunities, and that he may have become aware of the fact that his knowledge of English would be more beneficial in trade than to spread Buddhism.³²

Between the years 1886-1888, Matsuki traveled and lived in China. His memoirs reveal that he spent time in China’s largest cities, including Peking, Shanghai, and Tientsin. Although Matsuki refers to his stay in China, his memoirs fail to record what

he did while there. Sharf believes that Matsuki likely left his Buddhist studies by the time he arrived in China and found employment with a Japanese trading company where his language skills would have been highly coveted.³³

Eventually Matsuki returned to Japan, but he left again to sail to the United States on May 22, 1888. Matsuki reports that he sailed in steerage on the ship *Belgic* with only eighty dollars in his pocket and no guarantee of employment upon arrival. Matsuki does mention having in his possession a dozen “letters of introduction” that he had acquired from contacts in China. Upon his arrival in San Francisco on June 7, 1888 he acquired lodging at the *Oriental Hotel* and attempted to use his letters to find employment in California. Matsuki was unsuccessful in making any meaningful connections in San Francisco, however, and records that in a fit of frustration he burned his twelve letters, vowing not depend on the help of others to find success in America.³⁴

Despite his desire for success through his own merit, however, it became apparent that he did require proper connections to forward his own career. He befriended a Japanese businessman named Katsutaro Watanuki. Watanuki was bound for Boston, and then on to Salem, to meet with an American scholar and Japanese ethnographer, Edward Morse, and he offered to introduce Matsuki to Morse. Ironically, Matsuki had been given his own letter of introduction to Morse prior to his departure from Japan, but it was among those he burned while in California.³⁵

Matsuki described his first meeting with Edward Morse positively, despite his initial embarrassment at not having a proper introduction.³⁶ Matsuki quickly made himself useful to Morse, working to translate characters and other writing on Japanese

pots, which Morse was cataloging. Matsuki found this easy work due to his language skills and monastic training and Morse hired him as an assistant.³⁷

In 1888 Morse became Matsuki's guardian and he moved in with the Morse family. That fall Matsuki enrolled as a student at Salem High School.³⁸ Though considerably older than the other students, he was accepted into the school's accelerated three-year program and graduated in 1891. While studying at the high school Matsuki continued to work for Morse but also translated medical texts which Morse had given to the Boston Public Library.

From the beginning, the people of Salem were intrigued by Matsuki's presence. His classmates thought him an interesting and mysterious figure and he became a popular guest at dinner parties hosted by some of Salem's wealthiest society members.³⁹ Matsuki's ethnicity, or "otherness," allowed him to cross into social classes impassable to Salemites of the same class.

The men and women of Salem can be counted among those caught up in the Japanese enthusiasm known at the "Japanese Craze" and Bunkio Matsuki became the city's very own curio.

As mentioned in Chapter three, on August 1, 1891, Almy, Bigelow & Washburn opened the "Japanese Bazaar." Managed by Bunkio Matsuki, the department took years to plan, and careful advertising had the city residents highly anticipating its opening day. In 1890, James Almy proposed to Edward Morse that the pair send Matsuki back to Japan to complete some "on site research" on behalf of Morse, and that, while there, he also work to purchase items for Almy to sell in his store. Four weeks later, Matsuki took a

leave of absence from school and returned to Japan. In a letter written to Edward Morse in March of 1890, Matsuki makes mention of purchasing “more new marks” for Morse’s collection and references his progress in finding items for Almy.⁴⁰

Matsuki returned to Salem the following July with a large assortment of “genuine Japanese” articles and his return was trumpeted by regular articles in the *Salem Evening News*. The newspaper held interviews with Almy and Matsuki about the department’s grand opening and Matsuki himself penned advertising literature published in the *Salem Evening News* describing Japanese design and publishing announcements of items for sale. Shopping at Matsuki’s bazaar, patrons were offered an authentic Japanese experience and “real” Japanese goods.

In one article, Matsuki wrote for the paper about the upcoming opening of his department at the Almy store, he referred to “Yokohama-Muki” merchandise. These items, made in “Yokohama fashion,” were made to “deceive admirers of Japanese art because they have lost their characteristic of art.” Matsuki explains that these items, though “made by the hands of Japanese manufacturers,” held few traditional aesthetic qualities. Matsuki went to Japan, he assured his readers, to ensure that the products sold at Almy’s were the best products at the best prices.⁴¹ Other articles Matsuki penned offered definitions of terms and goods to prospective buyers and assured them that additional questions about the merchandise would be “cheerfully answered by Mr. Bunkio Matsuki himself in the department.”⁴² Matsuki’s return to Salem in July was happily announced in the local newspaper. Additional articles in the paper described the arrival of his merchandise to the Almy store as well.

On August 1st, the opening day of the Japanese Bazaar, patrons flooded the Almy store. Visitors found on display fire screens, chop sticks and rice bowls, tea trays and cabinets, puzzles and toys, and silk and metal work all made by Japanese craftsmen. Almy promised competitive rates for merchandise, stating that since Matsuki had obtained the articles directly from Japan, they did not need to rely on “indirect and costly methods” to supply items. Matsuki’s Bazaar was wildly successful. Sales soared so high in the first week that additional orders for merchandise were immediately placed to Japan to ensure adequate stock.⁴³ The department became so popular that Almy was prompted to enlarge the store and reopen it on November 23rd, less than three months after its initial opening. On this day guests were invited to a “greatly enlarged ‘Japanese corner’.”⁴⁴ In addition to the many materials listed for sale, customers were promised a chance to visit with Matsuki, the host of the event.

The success of Matsuki’s department at Almy’s resulted in annual buying trips to Japan, which fueled greater media coverage. Almy’s advertising campaign created such an impressive mythical impression of Matsuki that today’s historians find it difficult to sort out fact and fiction.⁴⁵

The popularity of his department made Almy’s one of the most successful department stores on the North Shore. By 1891 its collection was large enough to compete with Boston merchants, attracting many Bostonians who traveled to Salem to shop for Matsuki’s hand-chosen wares or employed Matsuki directly to make purchases for them.⁴⁶

Matsuki's regular trips proved beneficial in expanding his purchasing network in Japan, and also increasing his own net worth. Moreover, with each trip, his prestige grew among consumers in Salem and around New England. Matsuki's trip to Japan in 1892 must have been exhausting. He purchased items for Morse's personal collection and for Almy. He also worked as a personal shopper for various members of Salem and Boston society and began building his own collection to stock an export shop he planned to open in Boston the following year. Matsuki's Kobe based Export Company was operated by his family, who continued living in Japan.⁴⁷

When Matsuki traveled to Japan, his future wife Martha Meacom was charged with managing the Japanese Bazaar at Almy's. Martha was born in Salem on October 25, 1872. Her father, Horace, worked as a druggist in the city, while her mother, Anna, worked from home, supplementing her family's income by renting out spare rooms in their Federal Street home. Martha and her two siblings, Annie and Ralph, all attended Salem Public Schools and Martha was at Salem High when Bunkio Matsuki enrolled in 1888.

Bunkio and Martha became fast friends, and Martha played a pivotal role in his assimilation by helping him improve his language skills and adjust to American cultural norms.⁴⁸ In 1891 Matsuki left his residence at the Morse household and began renting a room from the Meacoms. That same year, after both graduated from high school, Matsuki hired Martha to work as a clerk in his Japanese department at Almy's. Martha proved to be an invaluable resource for Matsuki and Almy's. Her own interest in Japanese art and culture soon made her an expert on the products for sale in the store.

When Matsuki left for Japan for his purchasing trips Martha was named manager of the department and oversaw all aspects of the Bazaar in Matsuki's absence from 1891, when she was hired, until the department closed in 1898.

Her position as manager at Almy's is unusual, as female managers in department stores during this time were not the norm. It also indicates that Almy and Matsuki were both willing to acknowledge her managerial skills and trust her business sense even at the tender age of nineteen. Although the majority of sales clerks in department stores were female, their supervisors were almost always male.⁴⁹ As manager, Martha oversaw the display and sale of products and became responsible for overseeing the employees in her department. It is not known what kind of manager Martha was. It is likely that she was required to supervise both male and female sales clerks and is as likely that she encountered some problems, including challenges to her supervisory role. Matsuki's trips to Japan typically lasted five to six months, so for at least half of each year Martha was at the helm of her husband's department.

Bunkio and Martha became engaged in August of 1893, and their engagement was soon announced in the papers. The impending wedding of Martha to Bunkio resulted in Martha's receipt of an "almost uncountable number of engagement presents, and as the wedding day approached the bridal gifts poured in a seemingly endless spray."⁵⁰ The pair married on June 14, 1894, their large wedding documented for the town in three separate articles announced in the *Salem Evening News*. The Matsuki's honeymoon found Martha joining Matsuki on his annual trip to Japan in the winter of 1895.

After Martha's marriage her decision to continue working was likely based upon her intimate knowledge of the department and may also indicate her husband's faith in her competency as a manager and saleswoman. Martha would not have needed to work because by 1893, her husband, who arrived in the states only a few years prior with eight dollars in his pocket, had amassed a comfortable fortune. His growing wealth allowed him to make plans to build a home for himself on Salem's trendy south side.

Soon after becoming engaged, Matsuki purchased a parcel of land from Edward Morse measuring 150 by 67 feet on Laurel Street in Salem and began the construction of his marital home. Matsuki drafted his own housing plans, which were inspired by traditional Japanese design. The home's construction created much local interest, so much so that *The Salem Evening News* published a three part series about Matsuki and his house. The first two articles appeared in September of 1893 and the last was published in June of 1894 to commemorate his marriage to Martha. The first article, entitled "A Real Japanese House," included a sketch of the home's exterior, as well as detailed floor plans. "Salem is about to have its long list of points of interest increased by a most attractive addition, one the like of which has never been seen in New England at least..." boasted *The Salem Evening News*.⁵¹ Dean Lahikainen, a curator specializing in American Decorative Arts, notes that the press attention given to the construction of the Matsuki home was unprecedented for such a "modest private dwelling" and such attention serves to indicate a community consumed by all things Japanese.⁵²

The Matsuki home consisted of nine rooms. The first floor had a parlor, study, dining room, and modern kitchen with pantry. The second floor had four bedrooms, a

modern bathroom with sink, toilet, and tub, and a large balcony. Matsuki sent his sketches to the Boston architectural firm of Andrews, Jacques, and Rantoul and hired them to build his home. The three architects studied Japanese carpentry and design based on Morse's book, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings*, and constructed the home using materials Matsuki had imported from Japan the previous year.⁵³ Morse's influence on the construction of the home extended beyond the architects' use of his design manual; he served as the project's construction supervisor for Matsuki and oversaw the building of the home while Matsuki was in Japan on business.

Although Matsuki's home was based on Japanese aesthetics, it effectively blended eastern and western features in its final design. Western design choices were largely influenced by environmental factors but also reveal a desire to include the modern "comforts" of western technology and design popular in the United States during this time.

When building the house, the architects accommodated, "American ideas of comfort and luxury."⁵⁴ Harsh New England winters required that "flimsy [Japanese building] materials" be replaced with weather resistant ones. Matsuki insisted upon the addition of a full cellar to accommodate a furnace because he did not wish to rely on open fireplaces to heat his home, as was still traditional in Japan. Matsuki's ability to afford a furnace for his home indicates some fiscal success as furnaces were expensive to purchase and install and many middle class families in Salem during this time continued to use their fireplaces and coal or gas fired stoves to heat rooms in their homes.⁵⁵

Matsuki used clay shingles on his roof rather than traditional Japanese thatching, a decision made to brace against harsh New England winters.

The interior of the home was so authentically Japanese that upon entering there would be “no hint that one is still in America.”⁵⁶ The materials used to decorate the home were “genuinely Japanese” and included fifteen crates of decorative items such as art tiles, wallpapers and wall hangings, floor matting and traditional rugs, room screens and rare pottery, though specifics of the home’s furnishings were not recorded. Matsuki hired a Japanese carpenter who traveled to Salem from Japan to complete traditional Japanese woodcarvings in the home. The construction of the home was complete in June of 1894 and the *Salem Evening News* did a final piece on the house to mark the Matsuki-Meacom wedding.

The completed structure is reminiscent of the “better class” of Japanese homes of the day.⁵⁷ The house stands as a two-story rectangular wooden structure with a broad sloping roof with a wide overhang. The rafters of the roof are visible on the underside of the house and along the front edge. Mock smoke holes are visible on the roof as well. Although Matsuki wished to heat his home with a furnace, he required that the architects keep the smoke holes visible as part of the home’s overall Japanese design.⁵⁸ The house, set back far from the street, allowed additional space for a grand lawn and a traditional Japanese style reflective garden.

Matsuki’s interior space was more authentically Japanese. The walls were left unpainted to celebrate the natural grains of the wood, and sliding screens, or fusuma, separated the home’s separate rooms. Decorative carvings on wooden paneling and stair

railings showed traditional Japanese artistic designs such as the sacred hou-ou bird, or Phoenix, flying over gnarled oak trees. A tokonoma, a traditional Japanese ceremonial and reflection space, occupied an important part of the home.

In contrast to these more traditional Japanese inclusions were westernized flourishes. Leaded stained glass windows, popular in America's late Victorian homes, were included in Matsuki's design but depicted pink lotus flowers rather than a more western theme. While the rooms on the first floor were separated by Japanese style sliding screens, walls were built on the second floor to separate each room and ensure a greater level of privacy to occupants. The house was electrified with incandescent lights at the time of its construction and indoor plumbing allowed for a modern bathroom and kitchen, conveniences not available to many other Salem residents during this time.

To westerners, traditional Japanese rooms gave an impression of "bareness and emptiness." In anticipation of this, Matsuki chose to furnish his home in a more western style. Although we do not know specifically the items he chose, he did make it clear through interviews with local journalists that the home's bedrooms all had "western comforts" and he expressed his wish to entertain Salem's notable figures. Matsuki told the *Salem Evening News* in September 1893 that part of his motivation for building his Japanese home was his desire to entertain and hold traditional Japanese tea ceremonies in his home.⁵⁹ Matsuki's understanding of American Orientalism, and his willingness to make changes to accommodate western design elements into his Japanese house, indicate his own understanding of American sensibilities and may reveal to us how he was so

successful in his business; he knew what items would best appeal to American consumers.

Matsuki's kitchen was cited as "a model of modern convenience," with a cast iron coal burning stove as well as a water heater and storage tank. Although traditional sliding screens, or fusuma, separated rooms throughout the house, the dining room and kitchen were separated by a small pantry with a long counter and flour barrel compartment, and a western styled swinging door. The kitchen pantry had a sink with modern plumbing, too; its basin set into wooden paneled cabinetry, and ample storage space with additional cabinets.⁶⁰ During dinner service, the Matsuki family used a buzzer concealed under the dining room rug to page table service. The placement of the buzzer permitted Martha Matsuki to summon help to the table for instruction without leaving her guests and indicates to us that the Matsuki's felt that the inclusion of a domestic servant was an important part of the running of their household.⁶¹

Bunkio and Martha Matsuki had a Japanese housemaid upon first moving into their completed home in 1894. The domestic, whose name does not appear in the records, is reported to "neither speak or understand a word of English."⁶² It is unknown if Martha spoke any Japanese but it would not be surprising if she knew some of the language. If she did not know any Japanese, however, Matsuki hiring a "Japanese youth" who knew no English to serve as his family's domestic would be curious. Martha's role as housewife would have potentially put her in charge of a woman with whom she would have been entirely unable to communicate. Also, since her husband frequently went away on business, she would have been left without a translator to give instruction or air

grievances. On the other hand, Bunkio would have understood that a Japanese servant would charm visitors to his home. Matsuki, very much a showman, enjoyed the focus and attention that he received from his neighbors. His decision to hire a Japanese domestic, and the spectacle that employing such a woman likely created, was likely a great motivator for his decision to employ her. The Japanese domestic left sometime prior to the 1900 United States Census, which shows that a local Salem girl, Susan Cotter, lived and worked in the Matsuki home.

Upon returning home from the World's Fair in Chicago, Matsuki discussed with the *Salem Evening News* the Japanese visitors to the fair and their domestics. Matsuki said that many of the Japanese people he met there were "of the better and wealthier class of manufacturers, art workers, or artisan," a class that he would have identified with based upon his own invented family history. These guests arrived with their servants in tow and Matsuki mentioned both employer and servant in his description of the fair.

Matsuki's interest in the presence of domestics may be connected also to the fact that employing a domestic was an uncommon practice in Japan during this time, and his ability to afford such help was an indication of great wealth and prestige in both Japan and America.⁶³ The fact that domestic service in Japan was uncommon signals to us how Matsuki blended his successes in both Japan and the United States in a way that best benefited his social standing and status. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that he would choose a Japanese domestic, possibly having hired her in Japan to return to the United States with him.

About six months after their wedding ceremony Martha joined her husband on his annual purchasing trip to Japan for a belated honeymoon. Martha, known in Japan as Masako, met her husband's family for the first time then. The couple left Salem in January of 1895 and traveled west to Vancouver, from where they departed for Japan. Upon arrival, the couple stayed at the temples in Nara, a center of Buddhist culture and art about twenty-five miles south of Kyoto; they returned to Salem the following June.

In the following years Matsuki's business continued to grow. After the success of his Boston store that opened in 1893, he opened another store in 1895 in Newport, Rhode Island. In addition to managing his stores, Matsuki traveled to Japan and visited cities throughout the United States, expanding his business connections.

Matsuki continued purchasing items for the Almy store and his selections continued to please Salem shoppers. Nevertheless, in 1896 Almy announced the closing of the Japanese Bazaar in his store. As noted in chapter three, the closing of this department was the result of a falling out Almy had with Matsuki. Almy's did not sever all ties with Matsuki, however. Although his department was removed from Almy, Bigelow and Washburn, he was listed as the store's "Boston Representative."⁶⁴

Bunkio and Martha had the first of their four children, a daughter called Tsuya in Salem in September of 1897. In preparation for the arrival of Tsuya, Bunkio had returned to the United States the previous summer with his sister Uta, who came to assist Martha with childbirth and recovery.⁶⁵ The arrival of Uta is curious, as Martha's mother also lived with the Matsukis. A young forty-eight she would have easily been of help to Martha during the delivery. Martha's older sister Annie lived nearby in Salem as well. It

is possible that Martha and Uta established a bond when they met in Japan in 1895 or possibly Bunkio wished to have a member of his family present at the birth of his first daughter.⁶⁶ A second child, a son named Edward Thomas, was born in Salem in October of 1899.

In the summer of 1898, Matsuki transferred partial ownership of the Salem home to his wife and she in turn took out a mortgage on the house. It is unclear why she financed the house. At this time, her husband was setting up an auction house in New York City so it is possible that they needed cash to establish the business. This is also an example of how Bunkio and Martha Matsuki took advantage of new laws allowing women “separate estates,” a change in the laws allowing women to own property as individuals. The Matsukis clearly understood the new laws, which both allowed women the right of ownership and the right to make contracts. It was also a way to protect a husband’s property, allowing him to make speculative investments. If this is the case, it does illustrate that much of Matsuki’s wealth was tied up in investments or merchandise and demonstrates that he did not have a lot of cash at his disposal toward the end of the decade.

In 1903 Matsuki rented his home in Salem and moved his family to Brookline. As the Matsuki’s no longer had business in Salem this is not a surprising move. A third child, a daughter named Catherine Kei, was welcomed by the family at their new home the following June of 1903. Bunkio and Martha’s last child, Eleanor Hisa, was born in

October 1907. Matsuki's family lived year-round in Brookline while he continued his annual trips to Japan and commuted regularly to New York City when home on business.

Martha Matsuki's daily life was dwarfed somewhat by her husband's activities. How she spent her days is largely unknown, aside from her initial contributions to her husband's business affairs during their engagement and the early years of their marriage. She appears in the record as a business minded career woman, very much the "woman behind the man." She directly oversaw the daily operations of his department at the AB&W and her obituary reveals that she served in the same capacity to her husband as he opened stores in Boston, Newport, and New York City. The circumstances of her death, then, came as a surprise.

Martha hanged herself with a knotted bed sheet in her home in October of 1916 and was found by her 17 year-old son Edward. The initial death announcement stated that she died in her sleep of heart failure.⁶⁷ Her husband was in New York City at the time of her death, and the family tried to cover up the suicide. Nevertheless, the coroner's report released later that month revealed that her death was self-inflicted, Martha leaving behind four young children, an ailing mother, and her globetrotting husband.

Martha was said to "have been ill" for several days prior to her suicide. Her depression could have been rooted in any number of events in her life, including her family's financial trouble, the accidental death of her cousin the previous month, and the illness of her youngest daughter, who had recently undergone an unspecified operation.⁶⁸

One wonders if Martha suffered from long-term depression or if her depressive symptoms were the result of recent trouble.

In addition to the financial and personal losses she suffered in the months prior to her death, there is evidence that her husband was unfaithful to her. Matsuki kept two Geisha lovers in Japan⁶⁹ during the course of their twenty-two year marriage and fathered a child by his second lover. We do not know if Martha knew about either or both of these affairs but such knowledge could have contributed to her growing depression. Martha's suicide raises a couple of questions, one of which is whether she suffered abuse at the hands of her husband. Only three months into their marriage rumors began swirling that Matsuki was hitting his new bride. Rumors proved so persistent that Matsuki responded with the following ad in *The Salem Evening News* on October 31, 1899:

\$100 REWARD

Whereas certain false, wanton and malicious statements have been made and industriously circulated by evil-minded people concerning myself and family, I hereby offer a reward of one hundred dollars for evidence which will lead to the detection and fix the responsibility on the person or persons who originated said false statements and circulated said false reports. I request that all information on the subject be given to my counsel,
J.J. McCusker, Esq.

Bunkio Matsuki⁷⁰

The publication of Matsuki's reward prompted a lengthy article in the *Salem Evening News* the following day. The couple met with a reporter to discuss "stories of personal violence used by Mr. Matsuki against his wife." The Matsukis confronted rumors that neighbors had heard "screams and cries" coming from the Matsuki home and

that upon entering the home to ensure the well being of both parties those same neighbors encountered “ a scene of confusion indicating that violence had been used by Mr. Matsuki towards his wife.” Mrs. Matsuki told the paper that no cries have ever come from their home, stating also that they did not have neighbors close enough to them who could hear such noise even if it had occurred. Edward Morse and his wife also met with reporters to confirm that they had never seen any signs of abuse. The Matsukis informed *The Salem Evening News* that they believed they now knew the source of the rumor and attributed it to a guest who had called on Martha shortly after their wedding but who was turned away for reasons that “were good and sufficient.” The Matsukis believed that this party was offended because Mrs. Matsuki was not available to meet with her and so set to work circulating the rumor.⁷¹

The above explanation of events, however, does leave questions. It seems unlikely that a woman would circulate such rumors simply because Martha had been unable to meet her when she arrived at the Matsuki home. That alone is not proof of abuse and it remains possible that Matsuki’s marriage to a white woman fueled racist outrage and drew the ire of some Salemites. Although Matsuki may have abused his wife, it seems just as likely that the accusations were the result of a vicious rumor mill meant to attack his growing social standing due to cultural mistrust or envy. The Matsuki marriage could easily have struggled under the weight of racism experienced within their local and national communities.

The Matsuki’s marriage and home life was sure to have suffered as a consequence of racism. The Matsuki family could have been easy targets to unsympathetic

community members who looked down at their interracial union and their bi-racial children. Overcoming such obstacles would have been possible only with a strong marital commitment and family structure.

While Americans consumed Asian decorative goods, their government applied the brakes to Asian immigration by passing a series of racially motivated laws. The 1892 Geary Law, which renewed the restrictions of the 1882 Exclusion Act, resulted in a Chinese boycott of the Columbian Exposition, although a Chinese exhibit still stood at the fair on the Midway Plaisance where “patriotic and commercially interested Chinese” were encouraged to entertain guests.⁷² And to the eyes of many nineteenth century Americans the Japanese were nearly indistinguishable from the Chinese.

Despite tightening restrictions, Matsuki was able to travel to and from Japan. He was disappointed to encounter racism when traveling to the United States, however.⁷³ He was particularly scandalized that all Asians were often referred to as Chinese. As a Japanese person, sensitive to the long history of conflict and animosity between China and Japan,⁷⁴ Matsuki made a point of explaining important distinctions to westerners.

While traveling to America for the first time, Matsuki’s largest complaint was about the food served to him and his compatriots. Matsuki states that he wrote a letter in protest over “Rangoon rice and Cantonese dishes” being served to him and his traveling countrymen, saying:

We Japanese are very different from the Chinese in our manner of clothing, diet, and housing. As such, we find it most difficult to eat horrible Rangoon rice and Cantonese dishes. Even leftovers from meals of first-class passengers would be more desirable to what we are being served. There are some among us that have not eaten at all because the food is so bad.”⁷⁵

Upon docking in San Francisco and traveling to Boston, Matsuki was horrified when he and his traveling companion were called “Chinamen” by a group of small boys. “With our frugal outfits, we must, indeed, have looked like poor Chinese. It shocked us greatly to discover that people could not distinguish the Japanese from the Chinese here.”⁷⁶

The recorded history of how the people of Salem received Bunkio Matsuki and his family omits any mention of racialized hatred while simultaneously embracing the ideals of late nineteenth century “Orientalism.” Matsuki moved freely about Salem society because of his status as an intellectual and businessman, but also because his very presence as “the other” created whimsy and intrigue among those around him. Many members of the Salem community, if not most, were intrigued by his exoticness. This is evidenced by the success of his shop and export businesses, and also through the excitement his marriage, the construction of his home, and his annual business trips created within the city.

Matsuki’s rise in Salem can be attributed to his strong business sense and good fortune. When Matsuki first arrived in the United States, landing first in California in 1888, he struggled to find employment and feared eventual destitution. His chance meeting with Watanuki and his introduction to Edward Morse in Salem dramatically changed his fate, however. Morse found in Matsuki an educated translator who could assist him with his own research and readily took Matsuki under his wing. The fact that Matsuki’s arrival in the United States coincided with the cultural trend of “Orientalism” only bolstered his chances for monetary success. His understanding of the export business, learned during his time in China during the 1880s, readied him for entrepreneurial tasks, while his ethnicity made him an expert among Salem’s populace.

James Almy sought out Matsuki personally so that Matsuki could make needed purchases for his store. Almy cashed in on Matsuki's "otherness" through heavy advertising. Almy guaranteed his shoppers superior merchandise because of Matsuki's personal selections from his "homeland."

Matsuki's unique relationship with his adopted American city and the continued connection with his homeland put him in a unique position to liaise between the two nations when the Columbus Exposition came to Chicago. The Japanese government's decision to invite Matsuki to peruse items being sent from Japan to the World's Fair indicate to us that by 1892 Matsuki had already climbed through some class barriers; he was by this time a well-known, if not a famous personality, and his business sense was being relied upon on a global scale. Matsuki readily, if not happily, cashed in on the popularity of the "Oriental" craze in Salem, Boston, and later New York City. Financial success soon followed, leading him to build his Japanese inspired bungalow in Salem's new middle class neighborhood not far from where the Smiths lived.

The Matsuki homestead remains his family's most obvious example of their middle class lifestyle. The location of the home and the relatively modest size of it reflect their middle class standing. The Matsuki family was surely more comfortable than most middle class families in Salem; the home's heavy cost of construction due to the importation of Japanese materials and laborers made the home a costly project. The fact that Matsuki was unable to complete some projects on the home, like the traditional Japanese garden, and that his speculative investments sometimes placed his family in

financial risk, demonstrate his family's economic limits. The house itself, however, remained a showpiece throughout their residence there.

The Matsuki's decision to employ a domestic servant occupies a curious place within their home. Matsuki emigrated from an area of Japan where domestic servants were uncommon; only his wealthiest neighbors in the Nagano Province enjoyed the help of servants. Matsuki's decision to hire a Japanese domestic may speak to his desire to have a servant who could easily care for a Japanese household. When she left, however, another domestic, a local Salem woman, Susan Cotter, was hired to care for the family. Matsuki's decision to hire a domestic servant shows us that he happily embraced service as a comfort of middle class living in America. The decision was unlikely his alone, however. Martha could have requested a domestic to appease her own middle class vanity or because, unlike her peers, she genuinely needed the help, since she ran her husband's shop during her husband's long absences until the birth of her first child in 1897.

Bunkio Matsuki clearly sought a middle class lifestyle and would have enjoyed achieving still greater societal standing. His own ethnicity, and his marriage to Martha, would have prevented him from reaching higher class standing, however. Matsuki successfully carved out for himself and his family a comfortable middle class living, although it is hard to judge whether he successfully merged his Japanese ancestry with his adopted American identity. The suicide of his wife may indicate that he was not as successful at blending these two worlds as his community members believed him to be. Matsuki understood that the preservation of his Japanese identity was important for his

business, although he was clearly willing to relinquish control over some areas to advance his business opportunities.

In six years Matsuki went from a near penniless immigrant to the toast of Salem. Salem society members invited him and his wife as guests to their elegant dinners, they attended important lectures and cultural events. Matsuki became a well known and sought after figure and in both America and Japan. His businesses were successful and his acquisition of material comforts fit comfortably into Salem's middle class community. The home he carefully designed and built came to embody not only his accumulated wealth but also secured his family's class status within the community. The newspaper's elation that his home included all "models of modern convenience"⁷⁷ reveals to modern readers that adopting new technology was newsworthy. Setting aside his celebrity status, Matsuki still occupies a unique place in Salem during this time for two reasons. Firstly, the objects he sold enabled others to, through their purchase, define or redefine their own class standing. Secondly, Matsuki's financial success allowed him and his family to redefine their own place in Salem society.

Matsuki was willing to make aesthetic changes to the design of his home in order to enjoy modern conveniences like plumbing and central heating, and more importantly he had the income to do so without creating a greater hardship for his family. Matsuki's adoption of technology and his employment of domestic servants served to validate his own standing within his community in Salem and in Japan. More importantly, his role in Salem fueled a spirit of consumption that is personified within his own lifestyle and those of James Almy, Fred Smith, and other cosmopolitan Salemites.

¹ More will be said about this in upcoming sections of this chapter. “American Orientalism” was a significant American trend from about the 1870’s until the 1920’s. A detailed discussion of this can be found in Mari Yoshihara’s book, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

² As quoted from an Almy advertising flyer entitled “Invitation to the formal Opening of our Japanese Bazaar, Friday, July 31, 1891,” *Almy, Bigelow & Washburn Advertising Materials 1891-1899*, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

³ *Morse Correspondence*, Box 9, Folder 8, Matsuki Letter, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

⁴ Olive Checkland, *Japan and Britain after 1895* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003) p. 42.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Commodore Matthew Perry, USN, arrived in Japan in 1852 to request the signing of the Kanagawa Treaty, which would permit trade between the two nations (while ensuring secondary gains such as safety for ship-wrecked soldiers...etc...). Perry was turned away by the Japanese government in 1852 but returned two years later. In 1854 the treaty was accepted by some heads of state that were plotting to overthrow the existing Shogun Tokugawa. For more information see Marius B. Jansen, *The Emergence of Meiji Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷ As is implied in Edwin O. Reichauer’s study *Japan: A Story of a Nation* (New York: McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 101-103.

⁸ Yoshihara, p. 9.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Reichauer, p. 103.

¹¹ The samurai’s sword, once a symbol of membership to an elite social, was stripped away from many samurai. The government also refused to allocate money to samurai families, which they had received under the previous regime. Ibid.

¹² Yoshihara, p. 19.

¹³ Norman Bolotin & Christine Laing, *The World’s Columbian Exposition* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), p. 106.

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

¹⁶ See Chaim M. Rosenberg, *America at the Fair: Chicago’s 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), pp. 240-241 and Yoshihara, pp. 20 for more information about the Phoenix House as well as its décor and garden space. Additional information about the Phoenix House can be found in Neil Harris’s article “All the World A Melting Pot? Japan at American Fairs, 1876-1904,” in *Mutual Images: Essays in American-Japanese Relations*, ed Akira Iriye (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 37-46.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 240-241.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp.254-257.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 124.

²¹ "A Talk on the Great Fair," *The Salem Evening News*, September 29, 1893.

²² Ibid.

²³ See for instance *The Log of the Grand Turk*, Salem ships that made numerous voyages to China, India, and the East Indies and the items the ship returned with. *The Grand Turk* was a Revolutionary Privateer owned by Salemite Elias Haskett Derby who is thought to be America's first millionaire. The *Grand Turk* was the third of three American ships to reach Canton and the cargo it returned to Salem with ignited an interest in trade with the Far East as well as creating great wealth for the town. See Robert E. Peabody, *The Log of the Grand Turk* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1926). Additionally, James Duncan Phillips's, *Salem and the Indies* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1947) further explains the cultural and economic significance of Salem's trade with China and India.

²⁴ It was quite common for men to order wedding china as gifts for their brides. These orders were placed in China and the porcelain would arrive as much as two years later. These porcelain dinner sets were often made special to order and would return to Salem on the ship's second journey. See, for instance, *Ropes Family Papers*, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

²⁵ For more information about Salem's participation in the spice trade see James Duncan Phillips, *Salem and the Indies* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1947), pp. 92-100, 340-359 for more information about how trade changed the lives of Salem's merchant families.

²⁶ Philadelphia and New York also had similar successes in trade with China and India and they were the two American cities whose ships preceded Salem's *The Grand Turk* to China.

²⁷ *Salem and the Indies*, pp. 222-248.

²⁸ Yoshihara, p. 56.

²⁹ Yoshihara speaks about the influence of Japanese watercolor artists on American impressionists; this link is carried over to French Impressionist painters, pp. 45-56.

³⁰ Yoshihara spends a considerable amount of time analyzing how *Madame Butterfly* was preformed to American audiences and is well worth reading, pp. 77-100.

³¹ Yoshihara, pp. 26-27.

³² "A Pleasing Novelty": *Bunkio Matsuki and The Japanese Craze in Victorian Salem* (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 1993), p. 9

³³ Ibid

³⁴ As cited in the fourth chapter of his memoir, which is translated and republished in *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 55.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid, pp. 57-59.

³⁷ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁸ An article in the *Boston Herald* dated April 28, 1889 reports that Matsuki was a "valuable member o the Morse Household."

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- ³⁹ At one of these parties he would meet Almy, who figures largely in Matsuki's life, and whose help was pivotal in shaping his own mercantile pursuits.
- ⁴⁰ Matsuki Morse letter dated March 1890. *Morse Correspondence*, Matsuki Letter, Box 9, Folder 8, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum. Matsuki also references some wire transfer of money and some scholars believe that Matsuki had enlisted his father as a buyer on this trip. See *A Pleasing Novelty*, pp. 13-14.
- ⁴¹ "Unquestionably Japanese," *Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Advertising Materials, 1891-1899*, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.
- ⁴² "The Abstract of the Explanation of Our Goods," *Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Advertising Materials 1891-1899*.
- ⁴³ See "Mr. Matsuki's Japanese Bazaar," *Salem Evening News*, August 2, 1891 and *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 15.
- ⁴⁴ "Japanese Opening, Monday, November 23," *Almy, Bigelow and Washburn Advertising Materials 1891-1899*.
- ⁴⁵ As is implied by Fredric Sharf in *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 19.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 20.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 19.
- ⁴⁸ "Mrs. Matsuki Found Dead in her Bed," *The Salem Evening News*, October 16, 1916.
- ⁴⁹ *Counter Cultures*, pp. 94-94.
- ⁵⁰ "Matsuki-Meacom Nuptials."
- ⁵¹ Descriptions of the house have been taken from the following *The Salem Evening News* articles "A Real Japanese House," "A Talk on the Great Fair," and "Matsuki-Meacom Nuptials."
- ⁵² *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 60.
- ⁵³ See Edward Morse, *Japanese Homes and Their Surroundings* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).
- ⁵⁴ "A Real Japanese House."
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid*
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid*
- ⁵⁷ *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 60-63.
- ⁵⁸ The triangular shaped smoke holes common in Japanese homes allowed smoke to exit the building from the central interior fireplace. Since Matsuki added a traditional Western Fireplace and furnace, he did not need these smoke holes but wished to include them as a design element. Glass panes were placed over the holes, which allowed additional light to be brought into the home's attic space. For more details see *A Pleasing Novelty*, pp. 65-68.
- ⁵⁹ "A Real Japanese Home," *Salem Evening News*, September 6, 1893.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid*
- ⁶¹ *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 80.
- ⁶² "A Malicious Fabrication," *Salem Evening News*, November 1, 1894.
- ⁶³ Elizabeth K. Eder, *Constructing Opportunity American Women Educators in Early Meiji Japan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2003), pp. 136-137.
- ⁶⁴ *A Pleasing Novelty*, pp. 100-104.

⁶⁵ “Personal and Social,” *The Salem Evening News*, June 25, 1897.

⁶⁶ Although his brother was living in Salem during this time, having returned with Matsuki from Japan the previous year to attend school at Salem High. See the timeline printed in *A Pleasing Novelty*, p. 37.

⁶⁷ “Mrs. Matsuki Committed Suicide By Hanging Self,” *The Salem Evening News*, October 24, 1916.

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Matsuki’s ability to keep Geishas in Japan while living in Salem is an indication of his rising in class in Japan as well. Only wealthy men in Japan were able to keep Geishas for their own pleasure and set them up in apartments. See Lesley Downer, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001), pp. 138-159.

⁷⁰ “\$100 Reward,” *The Salem Evening News*, October 31, 1894.

⁷¹ “A Malicious Fabrication,” *The Salem Evening News*, November 1, 1894.

⁷² Yoshihara, p. 19

⁷³ *A Pleasing Novelty*, pp. 45.

⁷⁴ During this time Japan and China were vying for control over Asian, fighting over Korea and Taiwan specifically and struggling with diplomacy, which led to the Sino-Japanese War. See S.C.M. Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-1895* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁷⁵ *A Pleasing Novelty*, pp. 52-53.

⁷⁶ Ibid p. 54.

⁷⁷ “A Real Japanese House.”

CONCLUSION

On June 25, 1914 fire erupted in Salem. In the northwest section of the city, Blubber Hollow, the city's leather processing district, began to burn. An explosion at the Korn Leather Company fueled a fire so strong that 250 acres of residences and businesses were destroyed.¹ That summer's drought conditions further fueled the fire as it swept east along Bridge and Boston Streets, consuming homes and factories in its path.

The city's historic and business districts were saved by fire brigades and the luck of changing winds while the fire swept on, devouring the Naumkeag Cotton Mill and most of south Salem. Salem's poorest died or became homeless by the fire. The wood structured cotton mill and adjacent timbered tenant housing was totally destroyed by the fire and displaced hundreds of Salem's laboring community members. The number of lives lost in the fire is unknown though three persons are confirmed to have died in the initial explosion at the Korn Leather Factory.

The population of Salem prior to the fire was listed as 37,000, whereas afterward it is listed as 27,000; it is unclear how many of these 10,000 died and how many relocated to other communities due to homelessness.² Nearly 1, 500 leather industry jobs were lost to the fire; with their homes and livelihoods destroyed by the blaze, Salem's laboring class was decimated.

By the time the fire swept through Salem the three Ropes sisters had long been dead and entombed in their family plots in their hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio. James

Almy, too, was gone, buried in 1899 after taking his own life. His grand achievement, the Almy, Bigelow & Washburn, survived the blaze due largely to changing wind patterns on the day of the blaze. Almy's Lafayette Street home also escaped the fire's destruction. The fire destroyed much of south Salem's middle class homes from Porter Street to Holly Street. Bunkio Matsuki's Japanese bungalow, though rented to a tenant as the Matsuki family now lived in Brookline, escaped, while their neighbors' homes less than a block away burned.

The Smith family was less fortunate. By the time the fire swept through Salem Fred and his Sally no longer lived at the Piedmont address. In 1907 Fred and Sally relocated to another home at 224 Lafayette Street, although they retained possession of their Piedmont residence as a rental property. By the time the fire had been contained, the Smiths had lost both of their homes to the terrible inferno.

Quite surprisingly, Fred Smith makes no note of the loss of either home in his journal. The last journal entry of note made by Smith prior to the fire is dated May 15, 1914, in which he describes the hiring of a new and unnamed "work girl" whom he agreed to pay five dollars a week.³ His next entry does not appear until three months after the fire on September 14, 1914. Here, Smith simply writes "new house on Jefferson Street in Lynn."⁴ Smith does not cut and paste a single article about the fire into his journal. One can only speculate about how he and his wife survived the fire and the upheavals of the following three months.

Salem Common, Winter Island, the Salem Willows, and Forest River Park all served as temporary housing to those displaced by the fire. Were Fred and Sally among

those who camped out in Red Cross tents? Fred's omission of his family's whereabouts during these pivotal months prevents us from gaining definite answers. Due to his family's comfortable middle class status and his own valued position within the community, it seems much more likely that he and Sally would have been guests at the home of a friend or a business associate.

Although many middle class families used the city's temporary housing for relief after the fire, the Red Cross tents became the temporary homes of the city's laboring class. The fire left the city's most vulnerable population greatly exposed and destroyed the city's working neighborhoods. When considering the dozens of domestic servants used by the Ropes, Almy, Smith, and Matsuki families, it is likely that some of these women whose names we never learned were displaced and maybe even killed. It is the lives of these women and their families that continue to remain untold.

In the years following the fire Salem rebuilt. Almost immediately after the fire, Peabody, Salem's western neighbor, took on much of Salem's leather work. What work was not moved to Peabody was shipped to southern states, never to return again. The Salem Fire of 1914 paralyzed Salem industry and although the Naumkeag Cotton Mill rebuilt and enjoyed profitability until after World War II, the city lost substantial revenue and again sunk slowly out of the North Shore's limelight.⁵

The Naumkeag Cotton Mill rebuilt tenement housing nearby their factory building, placing Salem's laboring class right back along the city's geographical class boundaries. Salem's middle class families erected homes again throughout south Salem,

building Victorian and Colonial Revival houses and reestablishing their lost community. Much of modern day Salem remains divided among these same class boundaries.

From 1890-1910, prior to the city's catastrophic fire, Salem enjoyed renewed commercial success brought about by a nationalized consumer culture and the pull of new shopping spaces. At the same time new technological advances and related industry, as well as clerical and service job opportunities, allowed for the emergence of white-collar jobs and the professionalization of a new work force. New professionals making comfortable salaries, looked to increase their social standing by acquiring household appliance and other luxury items. Technology could be used and consumed to define class within Salem and throughout the nation's modernizing cities. The success of Salem's Victorian commerce shows how the city strove toward modernity through retail and technological changes, while classes became connected through material culture and technologies despite geographical barriers within the city.

The Almy, Bigelow & Washburn store typifies consumption within the city of Salem and within the United States as a whole at the turn of the century. Almy nurtured in his visitors a spirit of consumption and brought new technology and luxury items to unite the city's three classes, and the store itself came to reflect the modernization of the city. It was the first store in the city to be electrified, using lighting not only for functional purposes but also as a design element. Electricity permitted his store other conveniences on a par with those seen in some of America's greatest department stores during that time, technologies unseen in other Salem stores. Almy's boasted an elevator, ventilation purification, and telephone service.

The transformation of Almy's dry goods store of the 1870s to a trendy department store of the 1890s exhibits the speed with which the city of Salem was transformed during the late nineteenth century. Almy used advertising to lure both men and women to his store, though women remained the primary target for purchasing, as the department store was seen largely as a gendered space. It was within the walls of the Almy store that Salem's citizens could find and seek to realize a new place for themselves in Salem society.

The Smith family probably best exemplifies consumption for class mobility. Both Fred and Sally were born to modest means. The children of Salem laborers, they rose as husband and wife to respectable middle class standing and built a comfortable home for themselves and their two sons through purchasing power and the acquisition of household technology.

The Smiths' lives were changed dramatically by the commercialization and availability of electricity. This change came not only because of their use of the new technology in their homes but because Fred's livelihood came from the city wide expansion of this technology; Fred not only made his living through the growing popularity of new technology but he and his family also enjoyed the use of it to operate new household purchases meant to entertain or lessen the burden of housekeeping. The Smiths consumed mass produced household technologies and welcomed the changes these technologies brought into their lives. They used domestic labor to lessen Sally's domestic responsibilities as well as to promote their own status in their middle class community. The Smiths enjoyed access to enough disposable income to pursue indoor

and outdoor leisure activities and even traveled for vacation and to visit family members on occasion. At the same time, however, their finances limited them during sickness and prevented them from taking the expensive trips their more wealthy contemporaries were enjoying.

The Ropes sisters occupied a unique place in Salem society at the turn of the century. Their family heritage and ancestral home provided them with strong financial and societal connections, despite the fact that all three women were born in another state and lived the majority of their lives outside of Salem. The “sissies” came to Salem as aged women to live their final years yet felt compelled to upgrade the house to incorporate new technologies such as indoor plumbing, central heating, and electricity. The three sisters also added an extensive addition to house a new Victorian kitchen showing their trust in modern technology. They chose to renovate their home in full modern fashion while memorializing their own family history; they easily blended the old with the new as they recreated their family space in order to continue honoring their family home and heritage. All three women made shrewd investments through the purchase of bonds, as well as stock purchases in railway and utility companies, demonstrating their independence and intelligence in a time where a patriarchal society would aim to make three elderly “spinsters” weak.

The Smith’s neighbors, Bunkio and Martha Matsuki, occupied the same class standing as them, though they struggled past different hurdles to make their way in Salem society. Arriving in Salem in 1888 from his native Japan, Matsuki overcame financial and racial tensions to claim a piece of Salem’s middle class lifestyle. His Japanese

heritage made him a desirable friend and party guest as Salem society members, much like their American compatriots, devoured Japan's newest exports. Matsuki's very presence in Salem renewed Salem's post-revolutionary cosmopolitan feel: he brought a foreign land to Salem's doorstep at a time when Americans nationwide were craving Japanese objects and "culture."

Salem's wealthiest citizens invited him and his wife as guests to their elegant dinners and they attended important lectures and cultural events. Matsuki was a well-known figure in both America and Japan, achieving celebrity status in both countries, which led to a successful import business. Still, his ethnicity marked him culturally as the "other." His marriage to a white woman caused much interest and fanfare during the months leading up to the event, but the couple is sure to have endured some prejudice within Salem and when traveling outside their city limits.

Matsuki's successful business ventures allowed him many material comforts and ensured him financial stability. His business was so successful that he was able to afford to design and build a peaceful home that demonstrated his family's accumulated wealth and secured their middle class status within Salem.

Matsuki arrived to Salem a penniless immigrant, married the daughter of a struggling chemist, and in a few short years managed to build a thriving business for himself and his family. Additionally, Matsuki constructed a comfortable home and filled it with expensive technology and beautiful objects. In this, Matsuki clearly defines his shifting class status through his family's consumption of goods and materials.

The Ropes, Almy, Smith and Matsuki families all lived in neighborhoods defined by their status and their acquisition of material culture. The Ropes sisters, the wealthiest of our four families, remain in the city's oldest and wealthiest neighborhood known as the McIntire District. James Almy and his family, Salem's nouveaux riches, occupy a new home on Lafayette Street in Salem, while Fred Smith, Bunkio Matsuki and their families occupy comfortable middle class bungalows in Salem's new middle class community in south Salem.

Historians Susan Strasser and Ruth Schwartz Cowan have written extensively about how technology was introduced into homes and how such technology was received and used by those living and working there. Both Strasser and Schwartz Cowan have noted that much of the technology made the lives of those using it more difficult and increased their amount of daily household labor. Despite this, families continued to purchase these items.

In Salem we found that families made such purchases to modernize their homes, to emulate their more wealthy community members, and to establish themselves within a new class. What items each family chose depended on the amount of disposable income they had to spend. While the Ropes sisters inherited their home and easily afforded their extensive renovations, Bunkio Matsuki acquired his property at a modest price from his mentor, and built it from the ground up with money earned after a few short years in business. And while Matsuki built his home, importing his homeland's finest objects, the Smith family's renovations stretched out over several years, as Fred Smith slowly saved the money needed to afford needed materials.

While the Ropes sisters traveled throughout Europe, and Matsuki traveled for business, the Smith family vacationed only two towns away from their Salem home. Income restricted some of these families more than others, but all of these families were connected through their desire for modern objects and spaces. Almy's famous department store became an important gathering space for the city's well to do, middle, and laboring classes offering objects to tempt all three classes. The success of Almy's, and the city's other shopping spaces, facilitated a rebirth in Salem's commercial success. During the second half of the nineteenth century, these successes overlap with class distinctions based upon inherited wealth, new wealth, genealogy, education, ethnicity, and material desires and allowed willing and gifted persons to redefine themselves and their families.

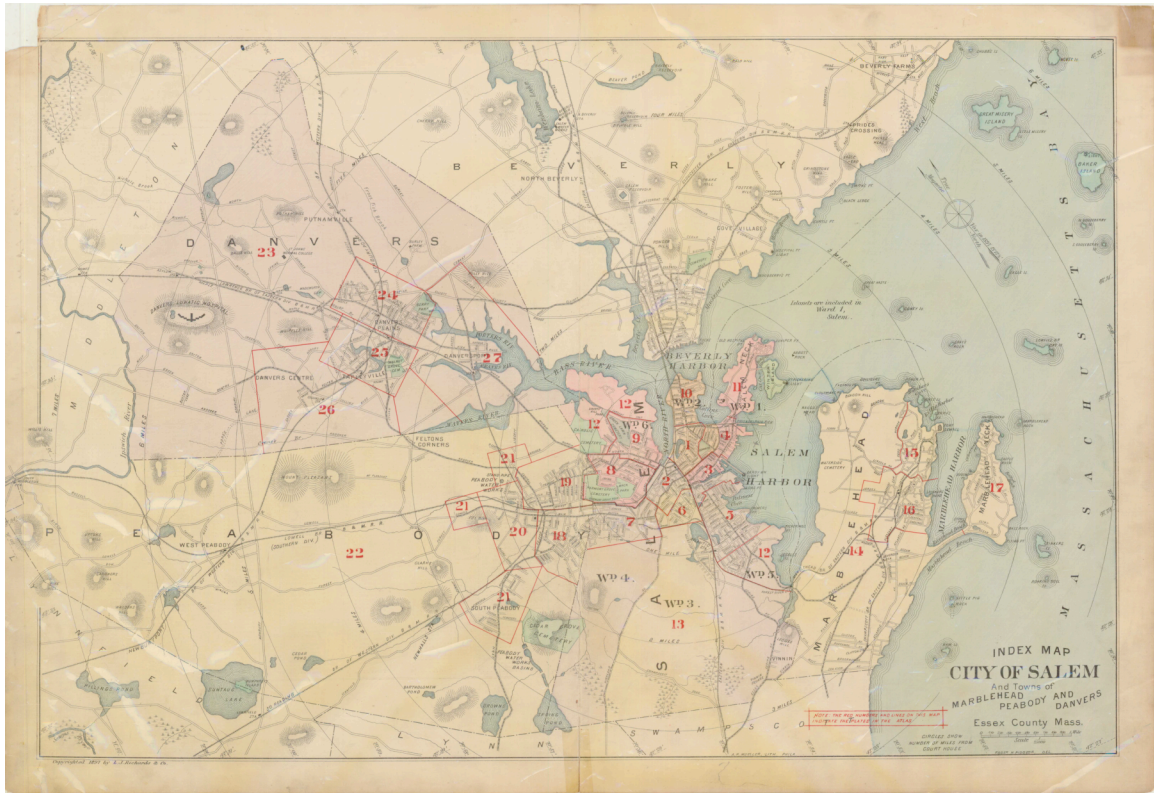
¹ Barbara Pero Kampas, *The Great Salem Fire of 1914* (Charleston: The History Press, 2008), p. 156.

² Ibid, pp. 59, 61.

³ *S. Fred Smith Diaries*, Diary #34, Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum.

⁴ Ibid, Diary #35.

⁵ See Clive Jarvis, *The Story of Pequot: Naumkeag Steam Cotton Co.*, (Boston: The Berkeley Press, publication undated), and Jim McAllister, *Salem: From Naumkeag to Witch City* (Beverly, MA: Commonwealth Editions, 2000), p. 85.



Map 1: Salem and Adjoining Town



Map 2: Naumkeag Cotton Mill and "Point" Area



Map 3: Naumkeag Cotton Mill and Nearby Tenement Housing



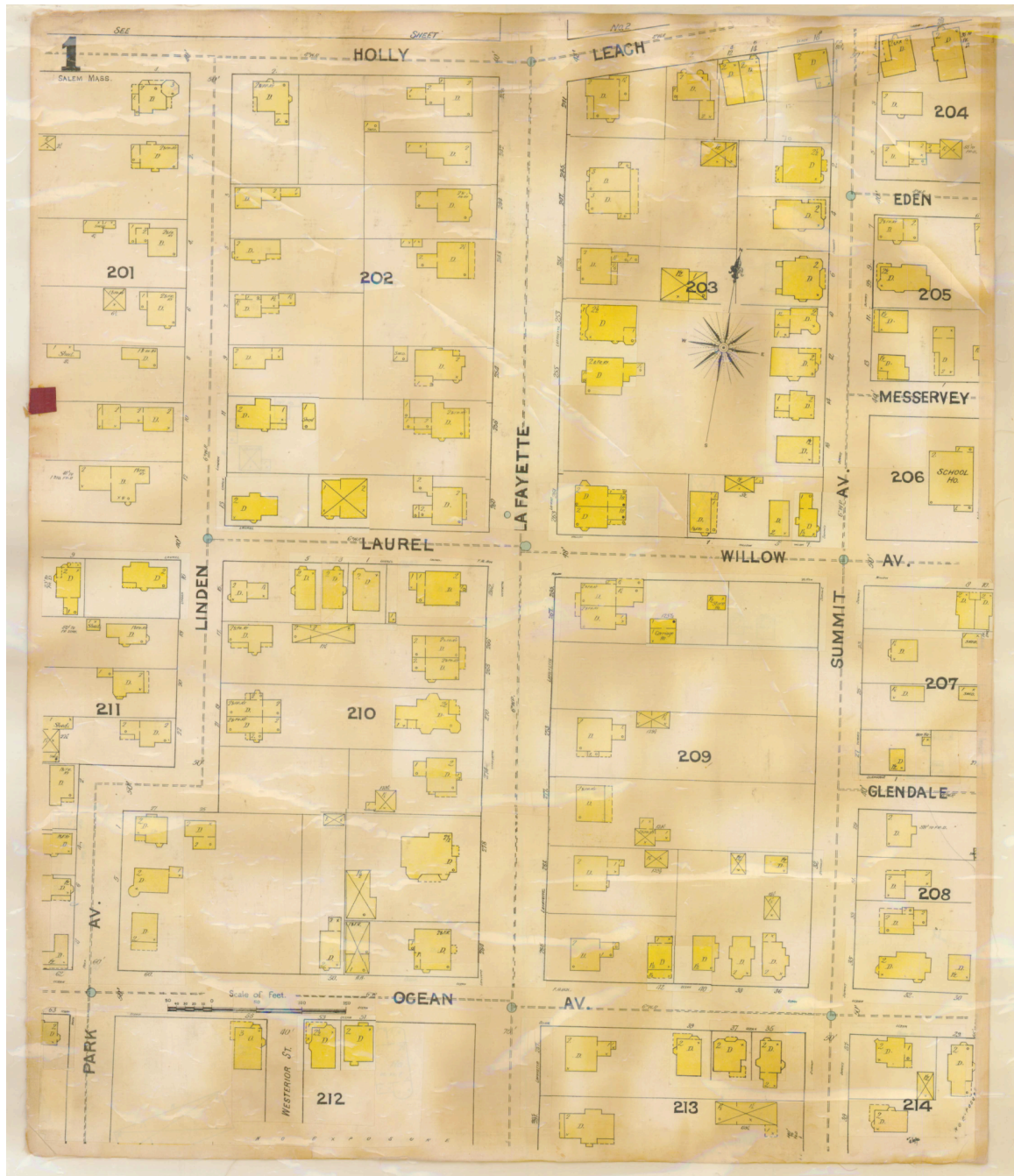
Map 4: Leather District or "Blubber Hollow"



Map 5: Salem Willows Amusement Park



Map 6: Piedmont Street (The Smith Family)



Map 7: Laurel and Lafayette Streets (The Matsuki and Almy Homes)



Map 8: Essex Street (The Ropes Mansion)



Map 9: Neighborhoods Destroyed by 1914 Fire

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